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The Graduate School

A STUDY OF THE TECHNIQUE AND FUNCTION  
OF ORCHESTRATION IN SELECTED WORKS  
OF CLAUDE DEBUSSY: *PRÉLUDE*  
*À L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE*,  
*NOCTURNES*, *LA MER*, AND  
*PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE*

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Arts

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College of Performing and Visual Arts  
School of Music  
Summer, 2002

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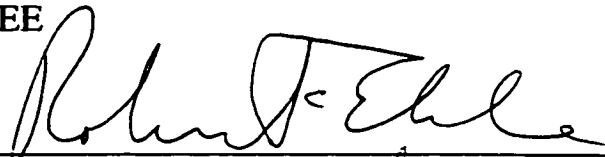


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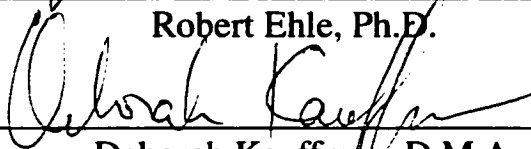
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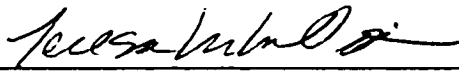
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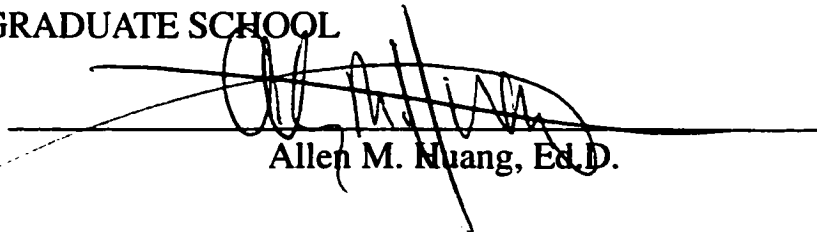
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## ABSTRACT

Chang, Chun-Hsien. *A Study of the Technique and Function of Orchestration in Selected Works of Claude Debussy: Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, Nocturnes, La mer, and Pelléas et Mélisande*. Published Doctor of Arts dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2002.

Debussy initiated a new epoch of modern music and greatly influenced music of the twentieth century. Debussy's music has always appealed to performers, audiences, and researchers not only because of his usage of nontraditional harmonic language, his fresh approach to form, and his exotic Asian borrowings, but also because of his colorful orchestration, which is based on his subtle and distinctive exploration of sound.

Four of his major orchestral works, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, *Nocturnes*, *La mer*, and *Pelléas et Mélisande*, are good examples for the study of Debussy's orchestration; all four pieces were completed between 1892 and 1905, a period when Debussy was closely associated with and influenced by Symbolist poetry and Impressionistic paintings. A systematic analysis and synthesis of the technique and function of the orchestration in the four selected works reveals characteristic aspects of Debussy's style, including uses of instruments, doublings, chordal arranging, special

combinations and effects, and special string techniques. The function of the orchestration is to serve as an articulation of the formal structure and to create pictorial imagination and emotional effects. Further, an original orchestration of Debussy's *Pagodes* from *Estampes* (for piano, completed in 1903) not only follows the style of the four works under consideration, it provides a synthesis of Debussy's orchestration style and technique.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Russell Guyver, my advisor, mentor, and good friend, instructed me on my conducting technique, enlarged my knowledge and refined my taste in symphonic repertoire and chamber music, as well as encouraged me and provided sufficient opportunities for me to conduct the UNC Symphony Orchestra. He has offered much extra time and effort to help me in providing ideas and improving the English expression in my dissertation writing process. As both an excellent violist and a conductor, Russell Guyver has taught me string techniques and inspired me to imagine orchestral sound effects, which not only constituted important parts of this dissertation, but also has continued to enlighten me in my conducting and the understanding of music.

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I also express deep gratitude to my sisters and brothers-in-law, not only for their support financially and spiritually, but also for their undertaking the duty of taking care of my mother. This has enabled me to come to study at UNC and complete my degree.

My family has always been the biggest support to me. I am so glad that we have studied in the United States together for three years. Even though this process of completing doctoral degree at UNC has been tough work for me, your accompaniment and support give me the strength to achieve it. I enjoy and cherish this period of time we have spent together in America. This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved family: my children, Kai-Chu and Chun-Che, and my wife, Shu-Hung.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Debussy and His Musical Thought

It is commonly agreed that Debussy initiated the new epoch of modern music; his influence on the twentieth century is widely acknowledged. Pierre Boulez, a famous conductor, composer, and a leading figure of contemporary music commented, "Modern music was awakened by *L'après-midi d'un faune*."<sup>1</sup> Absorbing and assimilating the culture of Impressionism and Symbolism, Debussy molded a unique musical style that has had significant influence on successive generations.

Claude Debussy was born in 1862. His childhood was very insecure due to his family's poor economic situation. Because of their frequent moves, Debussy had no chance to receive a regular education.<sup>2</sup> After the Franco-Prussian War broke out in 1870, Debussy's family moved to live with his aunt, Clementine, in Cannes, where Debussy had the chance to take his

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Nichols, "Debussy, Claude," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), vol. 5, 297.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1962), vol. 1, 6-8.



first piano lessons. In 1872, at the age of ten, he was admitted to the Paris Conservatoire. In 1874, he won the third medal for *sofège* and played the Chopin's second concerto at a Conservatoire concert. The following year, he won a first certificate with a performance of Chopin's Second Ballade. These early accomplishments in piano encouraged him to aspire to a career as a concert pianist, but he abandoned this after receiving no awards in the annual examinations of 1877 and 1878.<sup>3</sup> In 1883, he was awarded the second place in the Prix de Rome with his cantata *Le Gladiateur*, and the next year the cantata *L'Enfant prodigue* won him the first prize in that competition.<sup>4</sup>

Debussy completed his music training at the Paris Conservatoire and obtained practical experience as a piano accompanist in the Concordia Choral Society. These experiences helped him to learn from the traditional musical canon. One of Debussy's most admired composers was Chopin, to whose memory he dedicated his Etudes. Debussy also admired Emmanuel Chabrier, who, like Debussy, brought the influence of poetry and art to his music.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lockspeiser, vol. 1, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>5</sup> François Lesure, "Debussy, Claude," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 7, 103.

Several important musical experiences influenced Debussy's aesthetic.

During three summers from 1880 to 1882, Debussy was employed by Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky's patroness, as her children's piano teacher, and he accompanied their journeys across Europe and in Russia. Through these journeys to Russia, Debussy acquired a taste for Russian music. Another important influence on Debussy was the music of Wagner. In 1888 and 1889 Debussy visited Bayreuth and heard to *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde*. Wagner's music continued to be performed and favored in Paris in the early 1890s, but Debussy started to break away from that influence.<sup>6</sup> In the 1889 and 1890 World Expositions in Paris, Debussy discovered the Javanese gamelan, which had a strong impact on him.<sup>7</sup> Debussy also admired the folk music of Spain. *Iberia*, the second part of *Images*, was finished in 1910. It has a strong Spanish flavor, and exhibits Impressionistic ideas in the second movement, *Les parfums de la nuit*. Debussy's realization of Impressionist ideals will be addressed below.

Beginning in the mid-1880s the French Symbolist movement emerged. Debussy became acquainted with the poet Stéphane Mallarmé and often appeared at his Tuesday salon. Debussy also gradually discovered the literary works of Poe, Maeterlinck and other Symbolists. The characteristics

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<sup>6</sup> Lockspeiser, vol. 1, 30.

<sup>7</sup> Lesure, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., vol. 7, 97.

of Symbolism are generalized as the "rejection of naturalism, of realism and overly clear-cut forms, hatred of emphasis, indifference to the public, and a taste for the indefinite, the mysterious, even the esoteric."<sup>8</sup> These features became the center of Debussy's own aesthetic and gradually were applied to his music.

The first fruit of Debussy's mature style is his orchestral work, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, written in 1892-1894, based on a poem by Mallarmé. Debussy obtained his basic technique and knowledge from traditional musical training, but it wasn't until he discovered the essence and beauty of Impressionistic paintings and Symbolist poetry that he found his own music style. Debussy's first French biographer, Louis Laloy, revealed in 1909 that, "He received his most profitable lessons from poets and painters, not from musicians."<sup>9</sup>

Although Debussy's many techniques and devices (such as the whole tone and pentatonic scales, modal and tonal juxtaposition, and non-functional harmony) were not invented by him, his delicate usages of them became the most extraordinary aspect of his style. While he was in the Paris Conservatoire, one of his teachers, Emile Durand, regarded Debussy as

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<sup>8</sup> Lesure, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., vol. 7, 101.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

"a pupil with considerable gift for harmony, but desperately careless."<sup>10</sup> He was not a student who strictly followed the traditional doctrine. The unconventional expression of his musical character is mostly derived from the free, imaginative style of artists and poets.

Later in life, Debussy returned to more traditional thinking, particularly in respect to formal structure. His last big project was to compose six sonatas for different combinations of instruments, although he only lived long enough to finish half of them. The works are the only ones to use the title of "Sonata" in Debussy's compositions. However, they do not correspond to sonatas in the Classical Viennese genre, but are rather freer in structure.

Debussy died in 1918. His influences on contemporary music are extensive. Although their relationship was broken in the 1890s, Ravel revered Debussy as a master. Later in his life Ravel admired *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, saying, "It was hearing this work, so many years ago, that I first understood what real music was."<sup>11</sup> Debussy also influenced many other important twentieth composers such as Stravinsky, Bartok, Messiaen, Boulez and Varèse.

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<sup>10</sup> Nichols, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 5, 307.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 310.

## Impressionism

The term Impressionism was first used in 1874 in Paris by Louis Leroy in the satirical magazine *Le Charivari*, following the exhibition of Claude Monet and other artist friends. Louis Leroy criticized the paintings in the exhibition, especially Monet's *Impression Sunrise*, a sketchy picture of the harbor of Le Havre utilizing a loose brushwork.<sup>12</sup>

The group of artists in this first exhibition all insisted on "painting in the open air, and on the use of bright prismatic colours."<sup>13</sup> Rather than following the traditional method of dealing with sharp contrasts of light and shade and in constructing with outline, they proposed that the integration of a picture relies on the light and the exchange of colored reflections.<sup>14</sup> As Camille Pissarro, one of the members of the group said, "The eye should not be fixed on one spot but should take in everything, observing the reflections which the colors produce on their surroundings."<sup>15</sup> This concept of the painting of light and atmosphere was a strong influence on late artists as well as musicians, especially in France.

Debussy associated with many artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Maurice Denis and Odilon Redon. He also dedicated three works to artists:

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<sup>12</sup> James H. Rubin, *Impressionism* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Phoebe Pool, *Impressionism* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Denvir, *The Impressionists At First Hand* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 48.

the first piece of the second piano *Images, Cloches à travers les feuilles*, to Alexandre Charpentier, *Estampes* to Jacques-Emile Blanche, and one of the *Proses lyrique* to Henri Lerolle.<sup>16</sup>

Debussy proclaimed Joseph Turner (1775-1851) as "the finest creator of mystery in art."<sup>17</sup> Turner was the first artist to paint the sea in an impressionistic manner. The Japanese artist, Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) was also appreciated by Debussy, who requested that Hokusai's painting, *The Hollow of the Wave off Kanagawa*, be reproduced as the cover of the full score of *La mer*,<sup>18</sup> showing a close parallel between visual art and music.

The first work by Debussy to be associated with the term "Impressionism" is *Printemps*, scored for female voices and orchestra, composed in 1887 as the second *envoi de Rome*. This work was not accepted by the jury because of the character of "vague impressionism, which is one of the most dangerous enemies of truth in any work of art."<sup>19</sup> The judges objected to "the strong feeling for color in music which, when exaggerated, causes him to forget the importance of clarity in design and form."<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> Lesure, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 7, 101.

<sup>17</sup> Lockspeiser, vol. 2, 20.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>19</sup> Stefan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism*, trans. Rollo Myers (London: Eulenburg, 1976), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

lost orchestral version of the work was reconstructed by Henri Busser in 1913, but we have no means to compare this with the original.

Musical "Impressionism" started to be discussed at the turn of the twentieth century, with the appearance of Debussy's music. Critics often compared Debussy's music to Impressionistic paintings. Louis Laloy stated "Debussyism is the equivalent in music of Impressionism in painting and Symbolism in poetry."<sup>21</sup> After the first performance of *La mer* in 1905, Camille Mauclair and Raymond Bouyer all used the word "Impressionism" in reviewing this work.<sup>22</sup> Laloy in 1908 identified a new style in Debussy's music "which (is) completely Impressionistic at first, adopts more ample forms today, more precise ideas...without losing anything of its finesse or its freshness."<sup>23</sup>

At first the word "Impressionism" was used negatively with regard to music and referred to the apparently loose formal structure of the music. However, with the ready acceptance of *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*, Debussy's style became widely appreciated and imitated. Impressionistic painters created an atmosphere of blending shapes, colors and shadows, and constructed a vast sense of space; similarly, Debussy's music, with its

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<sup>21</sup> Ronald Byrnside, "Musical Impressionism: The Early History of the Term," *Musical Quarterly* 66 (Oct 1980), 527.

<sup>22</sup> Byrnside, 532.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 535.

ambiguous tonality, colorful orchestration, and exotic influences, suggested a musical equivalent to their canvasses.

### **A Brief History of Orchestration Up to Impressionism**

Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1607) is generally considered to be a pioneering work in terms of the development of orchestra. Monteverdi grouped forty-two instruments in three categories: strings, winds and fundamentals (continuo section), with different combinations to create colorful orchestration.<sup>24</sup> Exact instrumentation was not always specified. This large ensemble style influenced later composers such as Stefano Caccini and Antonio Cesti. Contrasting to the large ensemble style, Venetian public opera houses employed smaller ensemble with mainly a string orchestra with continuo and occasionally adding wind instruments. Generally this approach to the orchestra became standardized by later composers including Lully, Corelli, Vivaldi, Handel, Bach and others. The strings of the orchestra were written either in four parts—violin 1, violin 2, viola and cello with double bass sounding an octave below the cello line (a configuration generally favored by Italian and German composers such as Corelli, Handel and Bach), or in five parts containing two independent viola lines (e.g. in works by

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Térey-Smith, "Instrumentation and Orchestration: Baroque," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 12, 406.



Lully and other French composers, and in certain works by Italians such as Albinoni and Vivaldi). In the early eighteenth century, Corelli's concerto grosso style provided a new concept in treating the *concertino* as a solo group, distinct from the *ripieno* group.

In Bach's orchestral suites, four part strings with contrabass doubling the lower octave and continuo are the foundation, with 2 oboes and bassoon added in the first suite, flute in the second suite, 3 trumpets, 2 oboes and timpani in the third suite, and 3 trumpets, 3 oboes, bassoon and timpani in the fourth suite. This basic format was later adapted to Classical symphonies.

Many of Haydn's early symphonies used two oboes, two horns with four part strings. Occasionally flutes and four horns were employed. In the last movement of his forty-fifth symphony, *Farewell*, the cello and bass were written independently to fit the whimsical plot of the work. Triangle, cymbals and bass drum were used in his Symphony No. 100 to symbolize the Turkish military. In the last six symphonies (except No. 102), Haydn established the standard double wind instrumentation of the Classic symphony.

Mozart basically followed Haydn's instrumentation, but developed a full and blended sonority. His use of trombone in the operas *Don Giovanni*

and *Die Zauberflöte* intensified dramatic aspects of the plot: for example, in the solemn scene in the second act of *Die Zauberflöte* and Don Giovanni's descent into Hell at the end of that opera.

Blending sound is an essential esthetic element in the works of Haydn and Mozart, particularly in symphonic works. Many doublings are used; especially in instruments that have similar tone quality, such as bassoon and low strings, flute and high strings. The trumpet's brilliant high register, favored in the Baroque period, was thought to disturb the balance and was usually replaced during the Classical Era with a trumpet of lower register combined with timpani to reinforce a tutti.

Influenced by the development of instruments and a desire for more abundant sonority in symphonic work, the size of the orchestra was gradually enlarged. In his Third Symphony, Beethoven started to separate cello and bass parts, expanding the traditional combined treatment of the two parts. He included piccolo, trombones and contrabassoon in his Fifth Symphony, and more percussion — triangle, cymbal and bass drum — in his Ninth Symphony (again for a Turkish style as in Haydn Symphony mentioned above). Major contrasts were achieved through a wide range of orchestral sonorities and the dramatic employment of the dynamic range. Moreover, certain of Beethoven's significant techniques were imitated by

later composers, such as the programmatic usage of woodwinds to indicate birdcalls in the Symphony No. 6, and the timpani used in a melodic manner in both the violin concerto and the second movement of the Ninth Symphony.

The texture of symphonic works became thicker, darker, and more sustained during the nineteenth century. Also, increased agility and more refined tone quality of the wind instruments enabled composers to imagine and employ more characterized sonorities in their works.

Composers in the Romantic period pursued varieties of color and a more flexible interaction between string, woodwind, brass and percussion families. Less common instruments, such as English horn, bass clarinet, and harp were employed more frequently in their works to increase the timbre range of the ensemble. Hector Berlioz, in his *Symphonie fantastique*, explored extremities of orchestral color: the offstage oboe in the second movement and the offstage bells in the fifth movement suggesting physical space; four timpani in the second movement producing the effect of thunder; the use of two harps (often doubled in performance); the percussive usage of cellos and basses with timpani in the fourth movement; the use of piccolo clarinet in the fifth movement; the woodwinds' grotesque appoggiaturas and glissandos; and violins and violas' use of *col legno* in the fifth movement.

This distinctive use of colorful orchestration became a model for later composers.

In the late nineteenth century, Strauss and Mahler enlarged the size of the orchestra. Quadruple woodwinds, expanded brass and more percussion were employed. More special sound effects were produced, such as a muted brass timbre, the playing of the oboe and clarinet with a lifted bell to produce a penetrating sound (ex. Mahler Symphony No.1 and No.4), swirls produced by harp, and fast moving woodwinds. In his tone poems, Strauss used a number of descriptive techniques to suggest literal representations of the characters or scenes. In *Don Quixote*, for example, Sancho Panza's rustic character was portrayed by bass clarinet doubled by the tenor tuba, while the viola's intermittent ascending scales showed his garrulous character. Muted brass flutter-tonguing imitated the sound of the sheep. A wind machine in combination with chromatic scales on flute and harp glissandos suggested a flying scene. Blended sound was no longer as important as previously; instead, the distinct individual quality of each instrument became the focal point.

At the same time, the French Impressionistic composers Debussy and Ravel, in seeking distinctive colors in their music, also employed special techniques, such as muting, harmonics, tremolo, *sul ponticello*, and

glissando. Harp, cornet, oboe d'amore, saxophone and wordless choruses are used to produce special sound effects. But, the most distinct characteristic is the influence of Impressionist paintings and Symbolist poetry, which encouraged them to use the orchestra to suggest similar images in sound.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Debussy's music has always appealed to performers, audiences and researchers since the late nineteenth century, and many studies of his life and music have been undertaken. While these studies contribute to the understanding and appreciation of Debussy and his music, they leave some questions to be further explored. For example, many writers have argued over the formal structure of *La mer*, particularly in the second movement. In her dissertation on *La Mer*, Marie Rolf discussed Laurence Berman and Max Pommer's harmonic and motivic approaches in their analyses, which suggest a different understanding of the formal structure in the second movement of the work.<sup>25</sup> She also cited Douglass Green's suggestion to "abandon the traditional concepts of statement, development, and restatement, listening to the work as a coherent flow of short moments merging from one to the next,"<sup>26</sup> an idea that is in opposition to the traditional analysis. Close to

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<sup>25</sup> Marie Rolf, *Debussy's La mer: A Critical Analysis in the Light of Early Sketches and Editions*. (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Rochester, 1976), 154-156.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

Green's concept of "coherent flow of short moments," Simon Trezise analyzes this movement as a four-part structure.<sup>27</sup> Harmonic and motivic elements are the main points in analyses of Green and Trezise. Since the color of the orchestration is also a very important aspect of Debussy's orchestral works, it is important to correlate formal structure with orchestration. This study will consider how the orchestration serves to articulate the formal structure in many instances, with supporting evidence to underscore this idea.

Orchestration is an integral aspect of Debussy's musical thought. The techniques of Debussy's orchestral writing are very varied. Instead of using the strings as the main body of an orchestra, as in previous styles, Debussy viewed the woodwind as the basis of an ensemble.<sup>28</sup> Although he did not invent the usages of instruments and their techniques, the many delicate ways of exploiting them became Debussy's contribution.

Furthermore, in the analytical literature, I found a lack of systematic study of Debussy's orchestration technique. Most studies focus on one single work and emphasize harmonic, motivic, and formal analysis. Similarly, analyses of orchestration have mostly focused on the effects within a single work in question, or a general statement relating to the sonority. Technical

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<sup>27</sup> Simon Trezise, *Debussy: La mer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 62.

<sup>28</sup> Gardner Read, *Style and Orchestration* (New York: Schirmer Book, 1979), 124.

study and synthetic analysis in orchestration of the four selected works, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, *Nocturnes*, *La mer* and the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, does not exist.

This study will analyze Debussy's style and technique of orchestration in the four selected works by utilizing a systematic method. They will be examined from the technical aspects of figuration, doubling, juxtaposition, interlocking, enclosing, and overlapping to show how orchestration articulates the form, suggests pictorial images and provides emotional context.

My original arrangement of Debussy's piano work, *Pagodes*, from *Estampes*, is presented at the end of this study. Debussy's orchestration style is observed in this arrangement through the instrumentation, instrumental combination and orchestral color and effects.

### **Scope of the Study**

The four works selected in this study, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, *Nocturnes*, *La mer* and the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, were all composed between 1892 and 1905, a period during which Debussy was closely associated with the Symbolists. *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is a single movement structure—a tone poem— based on Mallarmé's poem of the same title. *Nocturnes* is a group of three pieces: *Nuages*, *Fêtes* and

*Sirènes. La mer* is a symphonic work with three movements entitled *De l'aube à midi sur la mer*, *Jeux de vagues*, and *Dialogue du vent et de la mer* respectively. *Pelléas et Mélisande* is Debussy's only complete opera, comprising five acts. An examination of the orchestration techniques of those works will be the primary task. Some other works around the same period related to this study will be referred to as necessary.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A large number of studies of Debussy's orchestral music exist. They are of varying quality and many of them focus on instrumentation and orchestration. Rather than surveying a broader range of Debussy's orchestrations, most of the studies examine a single piece and concentrate on musical style, harmonic study, formal structure, and performance practices. While provide good basic information for this dissertation, they fail to synthesize aspects of the orchestral style found in Debussy's works from this important period of contact with Impressionist paintings and Symbolist poetry.

The main body of this study is the orchestration technique found in selected orchestral works by Debussy; therefore, the literature discussed in this chapter is focused on instrumentation and orchestration technique, and on Debussy's orchestral music. Biographies of Debussy will not be included in the review. The review is divided into two parts; the first includes instrumentation and orchestration, the second focuses on literature

concerning Debussy's orchestral works. The publications are presented in chronological order.

### **Part One: Instrumentation and Orchestration**

1. Read, Gardner. *Style and Orchestration*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1979.

Read divides the history of the orchestra into ten periods through the Pre-Classical to the Avant-Garde eras. Each period is illustrated with music examples to give clear evidence in support of his arguments. The development of orchestral style is also presented from the viewpoints of instrumentation, formal structure, compositional techniques and sonorities.

In discussing the Impressionistic orchestral style, Read considered that it was not a reaction to the Romantic style, rather "it was a new manifestation of elements intrinsic in authentic Romanticism: tone-painting, an emphasis on mood and atmosphere, and an innate feeling for lyric and poetic expression."<sup>29</sup> Read points out "none of the Impressionists — Debussy or Ravel, Griffes or Delius, Falla or Respighi — wholly abandoned the large orchestra of the end of the century."<sup>30</sup>

In examining Debussy's orchestral works, Read suggests the following observation; instead of regarding the stringed instruments as the main body

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<sup>29</sup> Gardner Read, *Style and Orchestration* (New York: Schirmer books, 1979), 122.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

of the orchestra, and the woodwind, brass and percussion as the complementary and contrasting sections, Debussy considered the orchestra to have "a basic core of woodwind instruments to which were adjoined strings, brasses and percussion."<sup>31</sup> Read also finds "overlapping" (intricately interwoven textural strands) instead of conventional unison and octave doubling as an important technique in Debussy's orchestration.

2. Shatzkin, Merton. *Writing for the Orchestra: An Introduction to Orchestration*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993.

This book introduces an essential knowledge of instruments, including strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion, harp and keyboard instruments. Very detailed explanations from acoustical considerations, tone quality, register and articulation, fingering, bowing to special techniques such as *spiccato*, *jeté*, and *col legno* are given. A wide range of percussion instruments is introduced, including some unusual kinds such as the wind machine, sandpaper blocks, and slapstick.

In Chapter Seven — "Historical Survey of Scoring Techniques" — the author selects orchestral works from the Baroque period to the twentieth century and analyzes them in terms of texture, instrumentation, technique and effects, showing concise illustrations of the peculiar personal styles of the selected composers. Debussy, Ravel, and early Stravinsky are grouped in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 124.

the same style and brief summaries are given. One example from Debussy's *Fêtes* is given to illustrate pitch range, while two from *La mer* demonstrate density of the texture. In the discussion of new effects, the wordless choruses in Debussy's *Sirènes*, and Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* were thought to be treated as a wind section.

3. Kennan, Kent & Donald Grantham. *The Technique of Orchestration*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997.

This book gives a basic knowledge of instrumental technique, including range, articulation, bowing, and special effects. The tone qualities and technical problems in different registers are also discussed. The authors used various musical examples from the orchestral repertoire to illustrate the techniques and effects of their descriptions. Among them, an example from *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is used to demonstrate the effects of strings' unmeasured bowed tremolo and finger tremolo; also an example from *Ibéria* shows colorful use of pizzicato and guitar-like strumming effects.

From scoring for each group of instruments to scoring for full orchestra, this book provides practical instructions and suggests many problems of concern, such as: the character of the passage, light or heavy orchestration, and the relation between passages of chordal, homophonic or

polyphonic structure. These questions provide good points of reference for the process of analyzing an orchestration.

One other example from Debussy's *Les parfums de la nuit*, (the second movement of *Iberia*), is provided to illustrate the frequent division of strings, unusual doubling of horn with piccolos, and the delicate touches of xylophone, harp, celesta and tambourine, all of which are important effects in Debussy's orchestration techniques.

## **Part Two: Debussy's Orchestral Works**

4. Cox, David. *Debussy Orchestral Music*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1974.

In accordance with the purpose of the BBC music guides, this book gives detailed historic views with some general analyses to nearly all of Debussy's orchestral works. Works orchestrated by other composers, including *Printemps* by Henri Büsser, *Khamma* by Charles Koechlin, the *Rapsodie* for saxophone and orchestra by Roger-Ducasse, and *Sarabande* (the slow movement of the *Suite Pour le Piano*) and *Danse* by Ravel, are included in this book.

In the analysis of the *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune*, Cox points out a special instrumental combination: the final chordal memory of the flute theme undertaken by the muted horns and the first violin in its low register.

He also compares the ending of the music to the last line of Mallarmé's poem: "Flesh and spirit become a memory; the experience continues to reverberate inwardly."<sup>32</sup>

In *Sirènes*, the wordless female voices represent the voices of the Sirens, combined with string tremolos, woodwind arpeggios, and shimmering harps to describe the nature of the sea. Cox suggests the possible inspiration of paintings by Turner and Hokusai and works of the American writer, Edgar Allen Poe, on the vivid descriptions of the sea in *La mer*. Cox regards *La mer* as the most personal, wide-ranging and fully representative of Debussy's orchestral works.

5. Trezise, Simon. *Debussy: La mer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

This book is an in-depth study of *La mer*, from the background of its formation to the analysis of the entire work. Debussy started to work on *La mer* in the summer of 1903, and spent two years finishing it. Trezise presents detailed information on the drastic changes in Debussy's life during this time, and how they relate to the compositional background of *La mer*. He also discusses the other works composed in the same period.

In Chapter Three, "*La mer* in performance", Trezise provides information about the work's premiere and subsequent performances, as well

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<sup>32</sup> David Cox, *Debussy Orchestral Music* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1974), 17.

as critical opinions of the work. Toscanini, Piero Coppola, and Koussevitzky's performance styles are discussed as well. Through a comparison of recorded performances of *La mer*, Trezise discusses the metronome and tempo markings and the different tempi adopted by ten conductors.

Trezise cites Debussy on his antagonism toward analysis: "there is at present a strange mania that demands that the music critic explain, take things to pieces, and, to put it bluntly, kill in cold blood all the mystery or even the emotion of a piece."<sup>33</sup> But Trezise, by uncovering, in his own opinion, the design and the materials Debussy used in *La mer*, undertakes analytical tasks. Trezise analyzes the formal structure in Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, rhythm and rhythmicised time, motif and arabesque, and tonality and harmony are analyzed.

6. Briscoe, R. James, ed. *Debussy in Performance*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999.

This volume includes essays from music directors, musicologists, and professors of piano, music theory, musical history and dance studies. Four parts are set to classify the different fields of research: the spirit of Debussy performance, the genres in performance, interpreters on Debussy, and Debussy performance and score analysis.

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Trezise, ix.

James Briscoe, in his essay, "Debussy and Orchestral Performance", begins with discussions of documents, including Debussy's published and unpublished letters, music criticism, and interviews, as well as Debussy's dealings with the conductors who were closest to him. In the discussion of "The Performance Criteria of Line and Nuance," Briscoe cites the words of Louis Laloy about *La mer*, "an art of finesse but also a 'classic' art. . .that is distinguished from the impressionistic music of before, of the *Faune* and the *Nocturnes*."<sup>34</sup> Louis Laloy regards *La mer* as a new style in Debussy's music that correlates to contemporary painting styles: "No longer is there a pointillism, but there remains an impressionism of the emotions, translated into harmonies unique to the world."<sup>35</sup>

The first work for which Debussy provided metronome markings was *La mer*. Subsequently he did the same for the later orchestral works *Images* (with the exceptions of "Gigue") and *Jeux*.<sup>36</sup> In the discussion of tempi in Debussy's orchestral works, Briscoe uses a table to show the recorded tempi adapted by conductors in Debussy's circle and the generation thereafter. Debussy's tempo nuances and metronome markings are also presented in the table as a reference.

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in James R. Briscoe, "Debussy and Orchestral Performance," in *Debussy in Performance*, ed. James R. Briscoe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 79.

<sup>35</sup> James R. Briscoe, 79.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study provides a systematic analysis of the orchestration techniques of four selected works of Debussy. In the analytic process the following strategies have been followed:

1. The instrumental doublings and techniques of chordal arranging, including juxtaposition, interlocking, enclosing, and overlapping (these techniques have been discussed by authors such as Kent Kennan and Merton Shatzkin in their orchestration texts) are examined in the four selected works. In addition, Debussy's types of figuration for various instruments have been considered.

2. Special combinations and their effects have been scrutinized. For example, the muted trumpet doubles the English horn an octave higher in the first movement of *La mer*. When it is balanced well, the edge to each instruments' sound will be softened. Also in the first movement of *Nocturnes* and in the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the harp's harmonics double the flute to provide a bell-like effect.

3. Special technique and effects for strings employed in the four works being studied are explored. These include *pizzicato*, harmonics, *sur la touche*, *sur le chevalet*, use of mute and solo strings.

4. The illusion of physical space created by the orchestration is discussed, including the three trumpets' signals that gradually approach from the distance in *Fêtes* (the second movement of the *Nocturnes*), the horns' echo effects in the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, and the oboe and piccolo echo in the second movement of *La mer*.

5. The means by which orchestration is used to create pictorial imagination is discussed. For example, in the first movement of *La mer*, the fluctuation of the second violins and violas draws a picture of the shimmering wave; the figuration of the flute (later oboe) in the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* represents a typical melody that might be played on pan pipes.

6. The emotional effects created by the orchestration are examined and can be demonstrated explicitly in Debussy's opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

7. The density of orchestral texture is discussed.

8. In order to demonstrate how this study has enabled me to assimilate Debussy's style of orchestration, I include an original orchestration of Debussy's *Pagodes* from *Estampes*, originally written for piano.

9. In this study, the following abbreviations will often be adopted in the tables, examples and in the discussions: *Prélude* for *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*; *La mer* I for the first movement of *La mer*; similarly II and III for the second and third movements respectively of this work; *Pelléas* for *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

## CHAPTER IV

### WRITING FOR WOODWINDS

Debussy gave particular prominence to the woodwinds in his orchestral works, illustrating his resistance to the traditional Viennese string-based orchestra and showing his adherence to the tradition of French Baroque composers, Lully and Rameau, both of whom favored the wind instruments in their stage works. Unlike his contemporary German composers, such as Mahler and Strauss, who expanded the woodwind section greatly, Debussy basically adapted a triple woodwind setting with various combinations. Only in his last orchestral work, *Jeux*, are complete quadruple winds used. Although the employment of the instruments is not as large as his German contemporaries, Debussy's writing for woodwinds is subtle and varied and constitutes a very important aspect of his orchestration.

In the four works under consideration, two oboes, English horn and two clarinets are consistently employed with various numbers of flutes and bassoons. The piccolo, in *Nocturnes* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*, is alternated

with the third flute; in *La mer* it becomes a regular instrument. The contrabassoon is only used in the third movement of *La mer*. Table 1 shows the woodwind settings in the four works under examination.

Table 1. Woodwind Setting in the Four Works

	Prélude	Nocturnes	La mer	Pelléas
Piccolo		1*	1	1*
Flute	3	3	2	3
Oboe	2	2	2	2
English Horn	1	1	1	1
Clarinet	2	2	2	2
Bassoon	2	3	3	3
Contrabassoon			1	

\* alternating with third flute

### Piccolo

The development of Debussy's usage of piccolo can be traced from his orchestral works. The first work in which Debussy incorporates piccolo is his cantata, *L'Enfant prodigue*, composed in 1884 and awarded the first prize of the *Prix de Rome*. In the cantata, Debussy uses three flutes with the third alternating with piccolo. The main roles of the piccolo are doubling the first flute in unison, or functioning as the third flute to provide a complete triad in a single sonority.

In his *Nocturnes* (1899), Debussy incorporates piccolo only in the second movement, *Fêtes*, with similar treatment to *L'Enfant prodigue*; but one effective doubling in *Fêtes* shows a more confident treatment of this instrument. Beginning from measure 182 in *Fêtes* (see example 1), the restatement of the arching melody in two flutes is doubled by piccolo sounding an octave higher. Under a pianissimo background, even the lower register of the three instruments could be heard without difficulty. The agile property of the piccolo blends well with the flutes and also adds a bright color to the melody (the piccolo always sounds one octave higher than written).

The image displays a musical score for measures 182-185 of Debussy's *Fêtes*. The score is written for six woodwind parts: 1st and 2nd Flutes (1<sup>re</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> FL.), Piccolo (pic. FL.), 3rd Flute (3<sup>e</sup> FL.), Horns (COR. ANG.), Clarinet (CL.), and Bassoon (1<sup>re</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> BASS.). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo) for all parts. The melody is arching and features a doubling of the flute parts by the piccolo, which sounds an octave higher than written.

Ex. 4.1. Debussy, *Fetes*, mm. 182-185.

Debussy generally uses the piccolo very sparingly in his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* although the instrument is employed more frequently in Act III, scene 2 and scene 3, from [32] to [39]. After Pelléas climbs out from the castle vaults (in the previous scene he was led down to the castle vaults by Golaud), he is greeted by the fragrance of the sea, leaves and flowers. The sweeping passages of alternating flutes and harps begin to suggest an environment of fluid air from [32]. At [37], the piccolo's light staccato is grouped with the first oboe and alternated with the first violins to reflect the joyful mood of Pelléas and suggest that the air is full of rose perfume. Harp and horns (later flutes and English horn join) set up a delicate atmosphere. Beginning at [38] (see example 8.19), a bell is combined with the violins playing a light *spiccato* to produce a tinkling effect. This is alternated with the piccolo playing an identical staccato figuration. The sonority and articulation match well, and there is a subtle shift of color between the two groups.

*La mer* (1905) displays a more advanced usage of the piccolo, not only in its occupation of an independent staff (which requires a fixed player instead of a flute player who doubles on piccolo), but also through many explorations of the distinctive qualities of that instrument. Doublings and chord distribution remain major functions of the piccolo in *La mer*, but more

octave doublings (sounding, not written) are used to extend the range and increase the bright color of the ensemble.

The discussions following are focused on the special effects produced by the piccolo. In measure 105 of the first movement of *La mer* (see example 4.2), the piccolo's independent trill line adds unique elements to the tutti texture: it is the only instrument with this figuration. A C-D trill supplies two pitches of the pentatonic cluster that is the harmonic basis of measure 105 to 108, while the high tessitura is easily audible. The string figuration suggests waves, with the piccolo implying the spray above the wave; as the fastest moving line, it energizes the ensemble.



1<sup>re</sup> Fl.

2<sup>de</sup> Fl.

Fl. 1

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Bass.

Cor 1

Cor 2

1<sup>re</sup> Harpe

2<sup>de</sup> Harpe

Cello.

Cont.

Ex. 4.2. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 105.

An effective doubling occurs in the second movement; the piccolo doubles the first horn's chromatic figure sounding two octaves higher, with the tremolo violas sounding an octave below the piccolo. This is combined with string tremolos and a counter melody on oboe. The piccolo adds a focused edge to the broad tone color of the horn (see example 7.8).

To obtain a subtle nuance of tone color, Debussy often alternates almost identical figures played by instruments of similar tone color. Sometimes these shifts of color occur by measure; in measures 32 and 33 of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the melody shifts from clarinet to flute (see example 7.1). Sometimes it occurs abruptly on consecutive beats; an example in the second movement of *La mer*, measure 101 and 103, shows the piccolo and flute quickly alternating a sixteenth note figure (see example 4.3). Because the background is *pianissimo*, this shift of the color can clearly be discerned even in the low register, which is weak in both instruments.



Ex. 4.3. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 100-103.

It is uncommon in Debussy's orchestral writing for a steady chordal tutti to be sustained for two full measures; this happens twice in the second

movement of *La mer* (measure 155 and 159). Here, the B<sup>b</sup> ninth chords are activated by the sweeping harps. Doubled trills in piccolo, violins and violas blend well with the piccolo sonority, dominating and reinforcing the violins. A similar situation of piccolo doubling the strings is found in measure 195 of the third movement of *La mer* (see example 6.2), but the overall texture is heavier. Upper strings, English horn, two (French) horns and piccolo spanning three octaves in total, project a chromatic melodic figure through an extremely busy and intense orchestral texture that forms the high point of this movement.

A piccolo's solo usage (which is rare) appears in the second movement of *La mer*, measure 245, where the tritone motif reappears in the first oboe two measures previously. The piccolo continues the oboe line, matching the thin sonority of the oboe's upper register. The effect of the piccolo here is one of relaxation. The oboe approaches its upper limit of range; when the piccolo takes over the melody, it is in a very comfortable register for this instrument. At measure 245, the strings' E major chord with an added sixth creates a misty atmosphere, where, before the piccolo solo, a muted trumpet produces an echo effect of the previous oboe motif, evoking a sense of distance due to the suppressed overtones. After the piccolo solo, the harps'

pentatonic scales carry the delicate mood for a repeat of the echoes (See example 4.4).

The musical score for Debussy's *La mer II*, measures 243-248, is presented for a full orchestra. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Flute (Fl.)**: Part 1 (Fl. 1) and Part 2 (Fl. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).
- Clarinet (Cl.)**: Part 1 (Cl. 1) and Part 2 (Cl. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).
- Bassoon (Bs.)**: Part 1 (Bs. 1) and Part 2 (Bs. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).
- Oboe (Ob.)**: Part 1 (Ob. 1) and Part 2 (Ob. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).
- Horn (Hr.)**: Part 1 (Hr. 1) and Part 2 (Hr. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).
- Trumpet (Tr.)**: Part 1 (Tr. 1) and Part 2 (Tr. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).
- Trombone (Tbn.)**: Part 1 (Tbn. 1) and Part 2 (Tbn. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).
- Tuba (Tub.)**: Part 1 (Tub. 1) and Part 2 (Tub. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).
- Percussion (Perc.)**: Part 1 (Perc. 1) and Part 2 (Perc. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).
- Piano (Pn.)**: Part 1 (Pn. 1) and Part 2 (Pn. 2). Both parts feature a delicate, ethereal melody with soft dynamics (pp).

The score includes various performance instructions such as "multo dim", "pp tres doux", "(Sourdine)", and "Div.". The music is characterized by a delicate, ethereal mood and a pentatonic scale motif.

Ex. 4.4. Debussy, *La mer II*, mm. 243-248.

In the third movement of *La mer*, starting from measure 104, above the cyclic motive of the bassoons and the low strings, alternating F calls are energized by initial grace notes. The English horn leads the grace notes, followed by the piccolo. The piccolo first appears in its lower octave, the faint sound quality producing an echo effect to the English horn, again suggesting a sense of physical space. Six measures later, the piccolo repeats the figure an octave higher. The distinct effect of the grace notes suggests an approach from afar. Another grace note effect is found in the same movement from measure 245, the piccolo's high register easily dominating the ensemble, even in this heavy texture.

### **Flute**

Debussy's deft treatment of the flute, whether as an important solo instrument or combined in various configurations, is one of the most recognizable characteristics of the composer's orchestral style. The following discussion is divided into register, melodic usage, harmonic usage, doubling and special effects.

### **Register**

Debussy treats the flute's various registers expertly. The brightness of the high register and the magnetic warm timber in the low register are

utilized effectively in Debussy's orchestral works. Table 2 shows the flute's extreme range as it appears in the four works.

Table 2. Flute Range in the Four Works

	Lowest	Highest
Prélude	$d^{\#1}$	$a^{\#3}$
Nuages	$d^1$	$c^{\#3}$
Fêtes	$d^{b1}$	$b^{\#3}$
Sirènes	$c^1$	$f^{\#3}$
La mer I	$c^{\#1}$	$b^{b3}$
La mer II	$c^1$	$a^{b3}$
La mer III	$e^{b1}$	$b^{b3}$
Pelléas	$c^1$	$b^3$

Debussy's treatment of the flute's high register is very sensitive, particularly in the use of tones over  $a^3$ , which tend to be shrill and are rarely found in the four works under consideration. When these notes appear in a melody they are mostly doubled with the other flutes or different instruments to obtain a fusion effect. In *Fêtes*, measures 229 and 231,  $b^3$  and  $b^{\#3}$  (the highest note of the flute appearing in the four works) are employed in the first flute with the second and third flutes, first oboe and first clarinet doubled an octave lower, the second oboe, English horn and the second clarinet doubled two octaves lower. Here the substantial woodwind

doublings, employing eight instruments, construct synthetic sonorities and also support and smooth the first flute's  $b^3$  and  $b^{\#3}$  (see example 4.5).



Ex. 4.5. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 229-232.

In the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*,  $a^{\#3}$ , the only note higher than  $a^3$ , occurs only once, in measure 92. The first flute's  $a^{\#3}$  fuses into the  $a^{\#}$  minor chord constructed by the three flutes' *staccato* sixteenth note figure, serving to add an articulated and rhythmic contrast to the legato clarinets and violas, and is in imitation of the previous English horn figure.

Few examples show notes higher than  $a^3$  in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and they are similarly treated with parallel or lower octave doublings. The highest note for flute in this opera is  $b^3$ , appearing in Act III, scene 1, three measures after rehearsal [10]. Here, the  $b^3$  is in a *staccato* eighth note figure doubled by oboe and the first violins, which continue the music with a descending line after the woodwinds cease.

Debussy employs a great deal of flute in a low register in each of the four works. The solo melody in the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is a fine example (example 8.2). In the solo lines, Debussy uses most of the pitches in the first octave, producing a distant, trance-like character. Even though the lowest octave of the flute is weak in an ensemble, its tone color has an intense, exotic flavor, which is revealed clearly in a soft atmosphere. In a delicate background such as the second restatement of the melody from measure 21, the flute's solo confidently and comfortably lays on the first harp's soothing arpeggios and obtains a subtle articulation from the pizzicato basses and the exquisite touch of the second harp, which is supported by the hollow fifth constructed by horns and the celli. In this work, whenever the solo returns, the accompanying background always retains in soft dynamics to serve as a foil.

At measure 257 of the second movement of *La mer* (see example 4.6), the solo flute recalls the pentatonic scale from its low  $c^\sharp$ ; its slow register reveals a sensuous, velvety tone color. The glockenspiel follows the first flute to lighten the music with its tinkling sound in the next measure, where the basses, second flute, harp and the six first violins support with an E major chord. The violins' harmonics produce a flute-like sonority penetrating from the background. The cymbals soft sound adds a light splash



effect. All the distinctive tone colors of the instruments create a very subtle, delicate atmosphere to end the movement.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *La mer II*, measures 257-261. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Gdes fl., Cymb., Glock., re et 2de Harpes, 6. 1ere Voce Soli, and D.B. The music is in 3/4 time and features a delicate, atmospheric texture with various dynamic markings like *pp*, *ppp*, and *pp*. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes parts for Gdes fl., Cymb., Glock., re et 2de Harpes, 6. 1ere Voce Soli, and D.B. The music is in 3/4 time and features a delicate, atmospheric texture with various dynamic markings like *pp*, *ppp*, and *pp*.

Ex. 4.6. Debussy, *La mer II*, mm. 257-261.

Debussy uses the flute's low register in solo passages, and he also likes to employ the flute to add a dim color to the background. He often uses more than one flute in unison or chord arrangement in these situations. In the sixth measure of *Nuages*, the first movement of *Nocturnes*, the English horn's tritone motif is supported by two flutes' major third interval of  $g^1$  and  $b^1$ , which is doubled by the horns an octave lower. Five measures before the end of *Sirènes*, the third movement of *Nocturnes*, a gentle fade is created by the two harps and the female chorus, where the background is constructed by

the holding of  $d^{\#1}$  and  $f^{\#1}$  in octaves by *divisi* violins and doubled by two flutes in the lower octave (see example 6.24).

Many examples of Debussy's use of the flute's low register can be found in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. An effect similar to the example at the end of *Sirènes* occurs at the conclusion of the opera (see example 4.7); when the harp's feeble arpeggios finally settle on  $g^{\#1}$ , the strings assume the  $c^{\#}$  minor chord softly and widely in three octaves, with three flutes playing lightly their lowest  $c^{\#}$  minor chord (close structure), adding a veiled sonority to the delicate atmosphere.

The image displays a musical score for the final 4 measures of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, specifically the 'RIDEAU' (Curtain) scene. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Fl.** (Flute): Three flutes playing in the low register, marked *pp* (pianissimo) and *ppp* (pianississimo).
- Cors.** (Cornet): Two cornets playing in the low register, marked *pp* and *ppp*.
- Trp.** (Trumpet): Two trumpets playing in the low register, marked *pp* and *ppp*.
- 1<sup>re</sup> H.** (First Horn): Two first horns playing in the low register, marked *pp* and *ppp*.
- Cl.** (Clarinet): Two clarinets playing in the low register, marked *pp* and *ppp*.
- 4<sup>e</sup> V.** (Fourth Violin): Two fourth violins playing in the low register, marked *ppp*.
- 3<sup>e</sup> V.** (Third Violin): Two third violins playing in the low register, marked *ppp*.
- Vll.** (Viola): Two violas playing in the low register, marked *ppp*.
- V.-ll.** (Violoncelle): Two cellos playing in the low register, marked *ppp*.

The score is marked with a large '8' and a dashed line, indicating a repeat or a specific measure. The overall texture is delicate and veiled, with a focus on the low register of the instruments.

Ex. 4.7. Debussy, *Pelléas*, final 4 measures.

## Melodic Usage

Debussy treated the flute as an important melodic instrument in his orchestral works. The famous flute solos in *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* are good examples, showing Debussy's extraordinary melodic treatment of the instrument (see example 8.2). The sinuous melody has a strong arabesque flavor, which is an important feature in Debussy's music. In *Fêtes* and the first movement of *La mer*, the flute also serves as the main instrument to carry the highly ornamented musical line, in octaves with the oboe in *Fêtes* (see examples 4.11 & 6.7).

Many solo flute passages can be found in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. In the beginning of Act II, a graceful melody is taken by two flutes in unison (example 4.8). The flutes start from their bright high register, opening scene 1, *Une fontaine dans le parc*, in a limpid way.



Ex. 4.8. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act II, scene 1, beginning.

Aside from solo usage, Debussy often uses the flute as the highest part, doubled with the other woodwinds, dominating the melodic contour. At

measure 55 of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the expressive, lyrical melody in the middle section is taken by the woodwinds (see example 8.4). Here the first flute, first oboe, and the first clarinet are doubled by the English horn and the second clarinet in a lower octave, creating a blended woodwind sonority. Further examples of the flute's melodic usage in doubling with other instruments will be discussed later in the section on doubling.

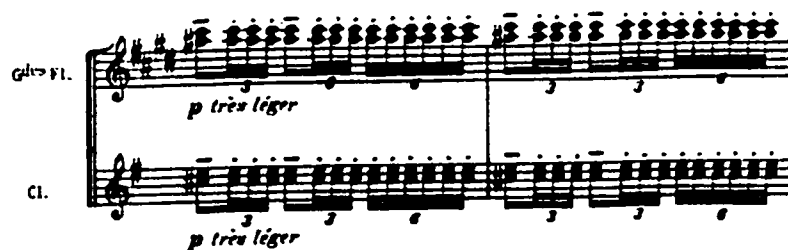
### **Harmonic Usage**

Debussy was skilled in producing a rhythmic uncertainty in his backgrounds. Measure 63 of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (see example 7.2) is a good example. Here the first flute dominates the triplet figures, alternately doubled with the clarinets and oboes, creating a rhythmic asymmetry that contrasts to the strings' slower moving melodic line. The second and third flutes, doubled with two horns, reinforce the harmony of the triplet figures. The two harps' arpeggios provide an effect of motion, while the low strings and bassoons support the harmony.

Aside from using the flute's low register to give a dim color to a musical background, as discussed above in the section on register, Debussy also wrote for flute in various supporting roles to enrich the texture. As will be discussed in the section on doubling, two flutes doubled at the octave is

one of Debussy's favorite settings, which he uses not only a melodic figure, but also as a harmonic and rhythmic element of the musical background; for example, in measure 156 of *Fêtes* (see example 8.7), two flutes double at the octave, enclosing the oboe in the middle, while two clarinets are doubled at the lower octave. This provides harmonic support and rhythmic continuity to the two main melodic lines in the brass and upper strings. Timpani reinforce the rhythmic pattern, and a rhythmically ambiguous effect is produced by the duple sixteenth notes of bassoons and horns and the snare drum's dotted rhythm.

Two flutes written in thirds is also a favorite setting of Debussy. The close structure has an intense effect particularly when the same instruments are utilized. In measure 60 of the second movement of *La mer*, two flutes a minor third apart prepare a distinct ostinato rhythmic background and continually accompany the English horn's main melodic line two measures later. Two clarinets in thirds double the flutes an octave lower to reinforce the rhythmic pattern. Here also the agile characteristics of flute and clarinet are favored by Debussy in the treatment of a rhythmic background (see example 4.9).



Ex. 4.9. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 60-61.

In *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Act I, Scene III, two measures before 36, two flutes in thirds are juxtaposed against two clarinets to construct a harmonic background and also provide an ambiguous rhythmic atmosphere (two against three) with the low strings.

### **Doublings**

Two flutes (or flute and piccolo) doubling in octaves is the most frequent treatment in the four works under consideration. This device can increase projection and strengthen the thin quality of the high register with additional overtones from the lower instrument. Apart from the flute family, the oboe is used the most often to double flute, followed by clarinet, then English horn. Except in a multiple doubling, bassoon and flute doubling is seldom to be found. Depending on the register, the flute is most often doubled at the octave below, although some unison doublings do occur.

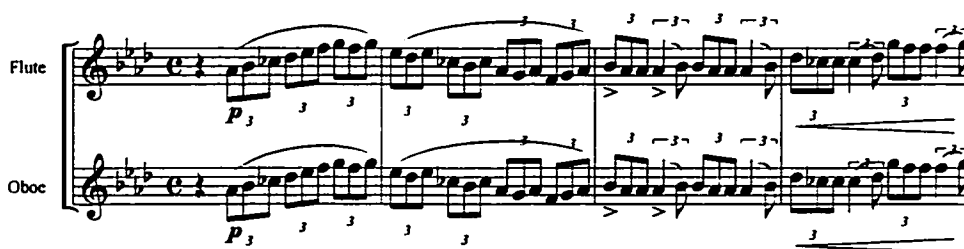
In the first part of *Fêtes* (before measure 116), two groups of instruments produce the contrasting tone color of the main arching melody line: at measure 3, the English horn doubled with clarinets (see example

4.10); at measure 11, two flutes doubled with two oboes (see example 4.11).

Here the two groups both incorporate double reeds, reflecting a similarity in the contrasting sonorities.



Ex. 4.10. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 3-6.



Ex. 4.11. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 11-14.

An effective doubling of the flute and the oboe occurs in the third movement of *La mer*, measure 159 (see example 8.16). Here, the first violins (one player per stand) play harmonics together with the sustained basses and horn to form a basic chordal support. The two harps' arpeggios and the tremolo strings support with undulated effects. The sea motif is taken by the doubling of the flute and the oboe at the same octave, which in their high

register creates a penetrating quality of sound. Also, the more articulated oboe offers a double-reed sonority to the combination.

One occasionally finds the flute doubled with instruments other than the woodwind section in the four works. The flute and violin playing a melody in unison to produce a blended and round sonority is one of the typical doublings in the Classical and Romantic period; Debussy occasionally uses this device. One short example is in *Fêtes*, measure 198-201 (see example 4.12), where two flutes and two violin sections are doubled in octaves.

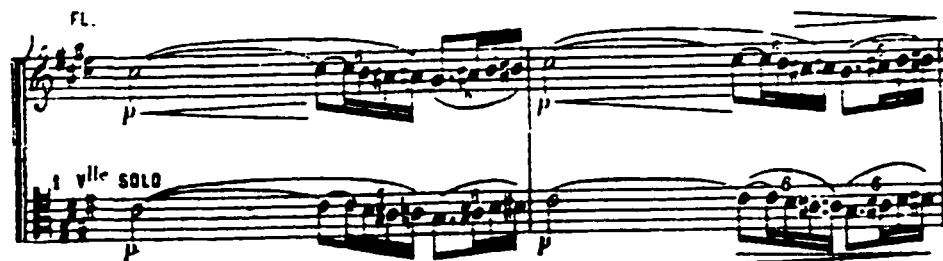


Ex. 4.12. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 198-201.

In *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (m. 100, see example 4.13) and the third movement of *La mer* (m. 72, see example 6.3), one finds two examples of an unusual doubling of flute and cello. In the former, the flute's solo melody is doubled by a solo cello at an octave lower, a blending of sonority in which both instruments retain their individual characters. In the



latter, two flutes play in unison in their bright middle high register, doubled by the divided first cellos at an octave lower, the brightness of flutes adding an edge to the cellos.



Ex. 4.13. Debussy, *Prélude*, mm. 100-101.

The last example in doubling is between the flute and harp. In *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (m. 50), three flutes playing in unison in their low register are doubled by the second harp at the same pitch, with the first harp's harmonics articulating each beat. In *Nuages*, beginning in measure 64 (see example 6.23), the first flute and the harp play the pentatonic melody in unison. After a modified melody played by three solo strings, the pentatonic melody repeats again, this time with a slight color shift by alternating with the harp's harmonics. In these doublings the flute's pure sonority is given a light articulation and ring by the harp.

## Special Effects

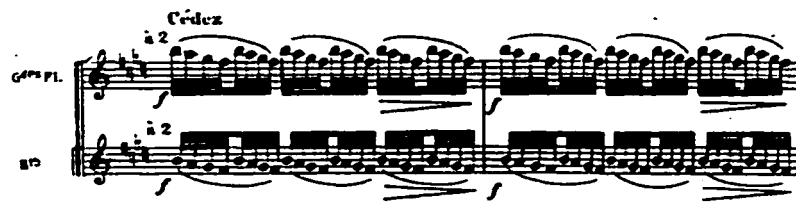
The many characteristic solos Debussy wrote for the flute show his particular usages of this instrument. Some other special effects calling for the flute can be found in the four works studied.

The sea is an important image in Debussy's musical expression; he uses many contrivances to describe its different features. The flute is used to fulfill some of these ingenious designs. From the first measure of *Sirènes*, the first clarinet's arching arpeggio figuration implies the shape of a small wave. Beginning in the third measure, the tighter arpeggios of the clarinet joined intermittently with the first flute in contrary motion suggest a more intense undulation of the wave (see example 4.14). A repetition of the wave effect occurs immediately after, with the oboe replacing the clarinet. In the same work, from measure 103 to 106 (see example 8.10), the first flute's descending arpeggios are succeeded by the second and the third flutes' trill-like figures in their low register. The three flutes' figuration here also suggests the ripple of the wave with a different shape.



Ex. 4.14. Debussy, *Sirènes*, m. 3.

At measure 72 of the second movement of *La mer* (see example 4.15), two flutes play a repeating scale-wise descending four-note figure to suggest a more urgent motion of the waves. This time the flutes are doubled by two oboes at an octave lower.



Ex. 4.15. Debussy, *La mer II*, mm. 72-73.

Debussy uses the flute subtly in *Nuages*. Two flutes holding a major third first appear at measure 6; the next appearance of the flute is not until measure 64, where it plays the pentatonic melodies doubled by the harp (see example 6.23). The absence of the flute's tone for such a long period creates a fresh impression at its reappearance. Also, its combination with the harp produces a distinct sound effect. The solo flute's last recall of the pentatonic melody at measure 98, mostly in its low register, creates a secluded milieu, which is broken quickly by the shrill tri-tone of the horns.

### Oboe

Debussy treats the oboe as an important coloristic instrument. He utilizes its particular character very successfully; the oboe has an excellent

singing quality, a little nasal tone, and a somewhat melancholy tone color.

The following discussion is divided into register, melodic usage, harmonic usage, doubling, and special effects.

### Register

Debussy's treatment of the oboe's register is very sensitive and effective. He uses mostly the range between  $f$  and  $c^3$ . Even though  $a^3$  is within the instrument's range, Debussy does not go beyond the  $f^3$  in the four works under consideration. The notes below  $d^1$  have a rough character, and Debussy uses them sparingly and usually in a quick motion or doubled with other instruments in order to avoid a too obviously rough character. Table 3 shows the range of the oboe as it appears in the four works.

Table 3. Oboe Range in the Four Works

	Lowest	Highest
Prélude	$d^{\#1}$	$c^{\#3}$
Nuages	$e^1$	$d^{b3}$
Fêtes	$d^{b1}$	$d^{\#3}$
Sirènes	$e^1$	$d^3$
La mer I	$f^1$	$c^{\#3}$
La mer II	$c^1$	$e^3$
La mer III	$b$	$d^{\#3}$
Pelléas	$b$	$f^3$

In *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the oboe's highest note is  $c^{\#3}$ . It appears only from measure 17 to 19 doubled by clarinets and violins (in unison and octaves) to reinforce the thin tone quality of the oboe in its high register.

The oboe's lowest note in *Fêtes*,  $d^b$ , appears only once at measure 48, in a staccato eighth note figure at the end of a descending  $D^b$  scale. At the same time the  $d^b$  arrives, three flutes in a chordal setting immediately assume the melodic line and cover the somewhat coarse sound of the oboe's low pitch. From measure 70 to 80 in *Fêtes*, the highest note,  $d^{\#3}$ , appears four times. Here, the melody is doubled with flutes and clarinets, and a mixed woodwind sonority is created.

In *La mer*, the lowest note,  $b$ , occurs at measure 29 of the third movement, as a harmonic note fused into the double reed sonority. The highest note,  $e^3$ , happens in the second movement at measure 153-154 (see example 4.16) and repeats two measures later, at the high point of this movement. Here, as the brilliant sound of the trumpets dominates the thirds shared by flutes, oboes, and clarinets, the oboe's  $e^3$  is covered by the full sonority. It is interesting that the grace notes,  $f^{\#3}$  and  $d^3$ , found in the other winds are not used in the oboes; this probably reflects Debussy's consideration of the register limitations of the instrument.



Ex. 4.16. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 153-154.

The oboe's lowest note in *Pelléas et Mélisande* is *b*. It is interesting to observe that when the low *b* appears, it is often combined with the English horn and low strings. In Act II, scene 2, five measures before 17 (see example 4.17), violas and cellos are divided, with the upper parts doubling the first oboe's low register, and the lower parts combining with the English horn to support the harmony. The oboe's low *b* is presenting in a short staccato eighth note doubled by the English horn at the same pitch, while the low strings hold a longer note; a similar situation occurs in the same scene at 32, but the bassoons are added to reinforce the double reeds' sonority.

Ex. 4.17. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act II, scene 2, five mm. before 17.

The highest note,  $f^3$ , appears in Act III, scene 1, two measures after 10, in the same spot as the highest note of the flute. Here the oboe's  $f^3$  is merged into the short but strong woodwind chord, and immediately after, the strings assume the melody.

### Melodic Usage

Debussy gives particular prominence to the oboe in his orchestral writing. In *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* the oboe is the next most important solo instrument after the flute: at measures, 14, 37, 77, 83, 86, and 103, the oboe's solos clearly penetrate the orchestra. It even assumes the motto-theme at measure 86 (and a fragment at measure 103), which is otherwise given to the solo flute. The expansive, lyrical and melancholic melody in example 4.18 shows the oboe's character to full advantage.



Ex. 4.18. Debussy, *Prélude*, mm. 37-39.

At measure 252 of *Fêtes* (example 4.19), Debussy alternates a short phrase on oboe with an identical one on flute. This technique of changing color by alternating instruments is used frequently by Debussy. Many composers (such as Beethoven, Berlioz and Wagner) including Debussy effectively alternate oboe and flute in this range. Debussy's alternating of these two instruments in this example at a *piano* dynamic creates a very subtle shift of tone color.

Ex. 4.19. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 252-255.



In *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the oboe has been regarded as the symbolic instrument of Mélisande.<sup>37</sup> The following example (example 4.20) is considered to be the theme of Mélisande, which with its various appearances permeates the opera.<sup>38</sup> The theme first appears in the opening prelude played by the solo oboe. The melancholy character of the oboe's tone color particular in its thinner high register is very appropriate to represent Mélisande's delicate, sensitive personality.



Ex. 4.20. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act I, scene 1, mm. 14-16.

Another solo example (see example 4.21) in *Pelléas* also shows the usage of the oboe's lower middle register. Displaying a rich quality in this register, the solo oboe's descending line suggests sadness, appropriately reflecting the three old men's miserable situation. Two flutes (having a hollow sound property in their low register) alternating in an ostinato figure suggest a lingering atmosphere. Here, the rhythmic juxtaposition of 6/4

<sup>37</sup> Arthur Wenk, *Claude Debussy and Twentieth-Century Music* (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1983), 39.

<sup>38</sup> Felix Aprahamian, notes to Debussy, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1979), CD, EMI Records CDS 7493502.

(flutes) and 3/2 (oboe) provides another contrasting element, adding rhythmic vagueness to the music.

43 revenez au mouvt

Flute 1. 2. *p*

Oboe 1. solo *p* triste et expressif

P *p*

Ce sont trois vieux pau-vres qui se sont en-dor-mis Il y a u-ne fa-

Fl. *pp*

Ob. *meno p* *pp*

P *p*

mi-ne dans le pa-ys. Pour quoi sont-ils ve-nus dor-mi-r en.

Ex. 4.21. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act II, scene 3, at 43.

A similar effect as in the preceding example happens in *Nuages* (see example 4.41). At measure three, the oboe's three descending notes again in its lower middle register give a distinct tone color to the ostinato figuration of the clarinets and bassoons. A cross-rhythm effect of two against three also occurs to create a slight vacillation to the ostinato pattern.

Apart from its use as a solo instrument, the oboe is also effectively combined with other instruments in Debussy's orchestration. Its combination

with other woodwinds and supporting the strength of the flute are the most common situations.

Although usually the flute is treated as the highest part in the woodwind section, there are passages in which the oboe replaces the flute as the highest part to lead the woodwinds in the four works under consideration. In these cases the oboe's double reed tone color easily penetrates the ensemble.

At measure 98 of the first movement of *La mer* (example 4.22), two oboes (with the first clarinet in unison) lead the woodwind when they take over the second thematic material, which is originally orchestrated for the cello section divided into four parts at measure 84.

**Au Mouvt (Un peu plus mouvementé)**

The image displays a musical score for measures 98-99 of Debussy's *La mer I*. The score is for four woodwind parts: Bb (B-flat), Cor A. (Cor Anglais), Cl. (Clarinet), and Bass. The tempo marking is 'Au Mouvt (Un peu plus mouvementé)'. The music is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line with dynamic markings of *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). The Bb and Cor A. parts are in unison, as are the Cl. and Bass parts. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 4.22. Debussy, *La mer I*, mm. 98-99.

At the fifth measure of the opera, *Pelléas*, (see example 4.23) the first motto-theme is set for the first oboe (doubled by the English horn an octave lower), with the second oboe at the sixths and two clarinets giving harmonic support. Here, the oboe's melancholy tone color dominates the sonority. The dark tone color of the bassoon, rolling timpani and basses, with a sustained  $A^b$ , continues the murky effect in the background, established from the beginning low strings.

**Très modéré**

2 HAUTOIS

1 COR ANGLAIS

2 CLARINETTES EN SI $\flat$

3 BASSONS

TIMBALES

ALTOS sourdines

VIOLONCELLES sourdines

CONTREBASSES

*pp*

*pp*

*pp*

*pp*

*pp*

*pp*

*pp*

*pizz*

*pp*

Ex. 4.23. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act I, scene 1, mm. 5-6.

## Harmonic Usage

When used as harmonic support, the oboe has an intense coloristic effect due to its unique tone quality. At measure four of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, after the solo flute finally falls to  $a^{\#1}$ , two oboes and two clarinets interlocking, play a diminished seventh chord to support the flute (see example 8.2). The dissonant chord revealed by this instrumentation has a pungent flavor, which is very appropriate for its poetic function of rousing the Faun from his dream.

The oboe combined with flutes and other woodwinds to produce an integrated woodwind sonority is often used in Debussy's scores. The woodwind *tutti* at measure 140 of *Fêtes* (see example 8.6) shows a well-blended combination of the woodwinds, exhibiting doubling, juxtaposition and overlapping.

Debussy likes to use a large combination of woodwinds to produce a mixed sonority as in example 8.6. When combining oboes with only one different woodwind, he seems prefer an interlocking arrangement, since it generates a more blended sound effect. The example at measure four of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (see example 8.2) shows this usage clearly. In *Pelléas*, Act I, scene 1, three measures after 12, two oboes and two flutes interlock and the next measure two oboes and two clarinets interlock (see

example 4.24). Here the well-blended interlocking effect in its staccato figure is agilely combined with the pizzicatos of the second violins and violas and the first violins' staccatos to reflect Mélisande's agitation.

The musical score for Debussy's *Pelléas*, Act I, scene 1, measures 12-14, is shown. The score includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Hob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (B.), Violin (V.), Viola (Go.), Violoncello (Vcn.), and Alto (Alt.). The Flute and Oboe parts feature rapid, staccato sixteenth-note passages with triplets. The Violoncello and Alto parts have pizzicato accompaniment. The Violin and Viola parts have staccato sixteenth-note figures. The vocal parts (V. and Go.) have lyrics: "Oh! oh! perdue i - ci Je ne suis pas ille i".

Ex. 4.24. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act I, scene 1, 3 mm. after [12].

## Doubling

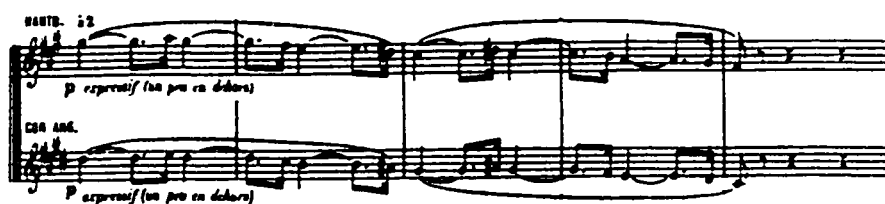
Debussy treats the oboe's doubling with the woodwinds very freely. In a big woodwind doubling passage such as at measure 55 of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the oboe adds edge to the whole section (see example 8.4). As discussed in the flute's doubling, the oboe doubling with

the flute, in either unison or octaves, is the most common combination in Debussy's orchestration. Apart from this, clarinet and oboe doubling occurs occasionally. At measure 118 of the second movement of *La mer* (see example 4.25), the return of the tritone motif is taken by the doubling of oboe and clarinet at unison. In the oboe's middle register and the clarinet's clarion register, the two instruments have very similar tone color, so the blending effect is excellent. For these two instrument doublings in the similar register, one can easily recall the first movement of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony.



Ex. 4.25. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 118-121.

Double reed doublings are also favored by Debussy, as they produce a very similar tone color. When the oboe doubles with the English horn, the English horn is usually in the lower octave supporting with a more nasal timbre. A good example is found at measure 86 of *Fêtes* (see example 4.26). Similarly as in *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 4, at 64, the theme of Mélisande is restated by oboe with the English horn doubling an octave lower.



Ex. 4.26. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 86-90.

The bassoon doubling the oboe without other instruments is not so common in Debussy's orchestration. One of the few examples is found at measure 179 of the second movement of *La mer*, where the bassoon at one octave lower adds slight body to the oboe's sonority (see example 4.27).



Ex. 4.27. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 179-182.

The oboe doubling English horn and bassoon is found at measure 56 of the third movement of *La mer*. Here, the oboe's sea motif is doubled by the English horn and the first bassoon an octave lower. The oboe in its higher octave dominates the tone color, and a fuller and contained double reed sonority is achieved by this doubling (see example 8.14).

An unusual but effective doubling appears at measure 43 of the first movement of *La mer* (see example 4.28), where the oboe, solo cello, harp



and bass double in three octaves. The oboe's pungent color blends with the soloistic A string of the cello and the harp clearly articulates their legato passage. The effect is of increased energy and purpose in the music.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *La mer I*, measure 43. The score is arranged in four systems, each with a different instrument. The first system is for the 1st Oboe (1<sup>o</sup> Solo), marked *p expressif*. The second system is for the Harp (1<sup>re</sup> Harpe), marked *p*. The third system is for the Cello (Cn), marked *p expressif les autres*. The fourth system is for the Bass (Cb), marked *pizz. pp*. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The oboe and cello have a melodic line, while the harp and bass provide a harmonic accompaniment.

Ex. 4.28. Debussy, *La mer I*, m. 43.

### Special Effects

The oboe's rather nasal tone color is used by Debussy to produce many special effects. In *Nuages*, the oboe is used to add shape and color to the notion of a cloud with its distinctive sonority and strongly-defined hemiola rhythm. In the second measure, the first oboe's three descending notes add a pungent effect to the trance-like progression of clarinets and bassoons, emphasized by juxtaposing 6/4 with 3/2 meters. Although the

oboe doubles the upper voices, it suggests a more rarefied layer to the air (see example 4.41).

In the same movement, at measure 57, two oboes take the first motif and a solo viola starts a counter melody with a chromatic effect (see example 4.29). Both instruments have similar nasal sound effect, but here the melodies have such different characters that clear layers are created. The cloud, imaginably, seems to be changing to a more distinct shape.

Ex. 4.29. Debussy, *Nuages*, mm. 57-60.

In *La mer*, Debussy uses many different devices to present the varied features of the waves. At measure 72 of the second movement (see example 4.15), two oboes playing scale-wise descending thirty-second notes double the flutes an octave lower producing the wave in a more urgent status, the thirty-seconds figure later on, gradually being replaced by the strings.

In *Sirènes*, a vivid effect is produced by the double reeds. At measure 105, a strong image is created by Debussy: the sirens (female voices) are surrounded by a wave (constructed by the flutes, clarinet and the violins); a

splash is produced by the wave hitting the rocks (harp, horns, and violas) and the first oboe and the English horn's (later the bassoon replaces the English horn) grace notes, with their pinched tone color, imitate the sound of the seagulls (the second violins reinforce the rhythm). It's such a lively and accurate duplication of the sound effect that the scene is easily imagined (see example 8.10).

Debussy favors an echo effect to create a sense of space. At measure 243 of the second movement of *La mer*, the tritone motif is restated (see example 4.4). Two measures later, the muted trumpet in its low register vaguely responds to the oboe and is quickly covered by the piccolo's echoing. The design here shows different layers of distance from the oboe to the trumpet and the piccolo. In *Sirènes*, at measures 112 and 114, under a complex texture, Debussy creates a light echoing effect from the first trumpet to the second oboe. In both cases the tone qualities of the echoing instruments are very similar, yet the slight difference of the timbre appropriately suggests a degree of sonic distortion between transmission and echo. In the history of orchestration, using oboe to echo trumpet can be traced back at least as far as Handel's opera, *Giulio Cesare*.

## English Horn

The English horn can be considered the 'character actor' of the woodwind section. Berlioz uses the English horn to resemble a folk instrument in both *Symphonie Fantastique* and *Harold en Italie*. In Debussy's orchestration, the English horn is a standard instrument. Nearly all of his orchestral and stage works employ it. Its distinctive nasal and melancholy character is used effectively to add color to the orchestra. The following study is divided into register, melodic usage, harmonic usage, doubling and special effect. (The English horn is in F, sounding a fifth lower than the written. The description here is all in its written status.)

### Register

Debussy's treatment of the English horn's register is very sensitive. His favored range of this instrument is its middle section, about  $f^1$  to  $f^2$  (transposed pitch), which has the most consistent and characteristic tone color. The written register range of the English horn in *Nuages*, only encompassing a diminished fifth ranging from  $f^{\#1}$  to  $c^2$ , gives a good illustration. Even though a high  $g^3$  could be reached, he never writes above  $d^{\#3}$  in the four works under consideration. The lowest note Debussy used in the four works is  $c^1$ , although a half step lower is possible. Table 4 shows the range of the English horn in the four works.

Table 4. English Horn Range in the Four Works

	Lowest	Highest
Prélude	$c^1$	$c^3$
Nuages	$f^{\#1}$	$c^2$
Fêtes	$c^1$	$c^3$
Sirènes	$f^1$	$a^2$
La mer I	$d^{b1}$	$c^3$
La mer II	$d^1$	$c^3$
La mer III	$d^{\#1}$	$d^{\#3}$
Pelléas	$c^1$	$d^3$

(in written pitch, sounding a perfect fifth lower)

Debussy often uses instrumental combinations to cover the thin quality of the English horn's high register. As the  $d^{\#3}$ , the highest note of the four works, appears at measure 85 of the third movement of *La mer*. Its part is doubled at an octave below by two bassoons and enclosed in a big woodwind *tutti*. The highest note in *Pelléas*,  $d^3$  (Act IV, scene 4, eleven measures after 56), is the same in a big *tutti* section and has the flute doubling an octave higher. In both cases, the individual sound of the English horn will not obtrude.

Although the English horn's low register is not as coarse as the oboe's, when Debussy uses it, he still likes to combine it with other instruments,

similar to his treatment of the oboe's low register. In *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the lowest note,  $c^1$  (at measures 48-49 and 56), is enclosed in a large ensemble. In *Fêtes*, the  $c^1$  (at measure 174) is the third of the  $D^b$  ninth chord and is closely grouped with two clarinets.

In *Pelléas*, a usage of combining (or doubling) the English horn's low register with either viola or cello frequently occurs in the opera. The nasal sound effect of the English horn adds a timbral edge to the strings in these situations. One of the examples shows in Act III, 6 measures before the end of scene 1, where the cellos, doubled by the English horn at the same pitch, support and extend the first violins' melody.

It is rare that the English horn's low register is presented alone. One of the few examples occurs in Act IV, scene 3, at 28. Here, the English horn's ostinato triplet figure (written  $c^{\#1}$  and  $d^{\#1}$ ) clearly comes through the sustained woodwind chords (clarinet, bassoon and horns) and the light tremolo of the violas. The English horn, with its pinched tone in the low register, plays a busy back and forth triplet figure, providing a vivid image of the flock of sheep approaching (see example 4.30).

28

dim. molto

C.a.

Cl.

B♭

Corn

Tri.

Y.

Alt.

Il n'y a plus de so - leil...

ppp

pp

28

Ex. 4.30. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 3, at [28].

### Melodic Usage

Debussy uses the English horn as a colorful solo instrument. He favors its particular melancholy and nasal tone color and composes distinct melodies for this instrument. Debussy assigns a very characteristic melody to the English horn with slight variants; these can be found in *Nocturnes*, *La mer* and *Pelléas*. It first appears in *Nuages* in an arching shape with a tritone-based interval as in example 4.31. In *Sirenes*, the similar shape and interval as in *Nuages* provides a reminiscence of the motif (example 4.32). In the second movement of *La mer*, the tritone motif is developed (example 4.33), which has a counterpart in *Pelléas* (example 4.34).



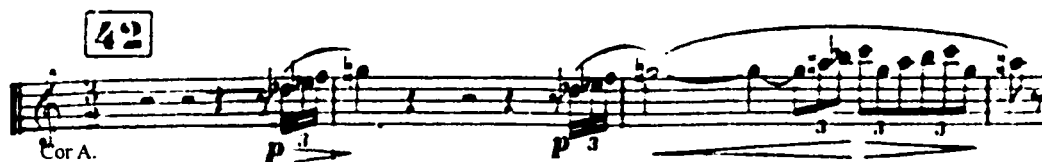
Ex. 4.31. Debussy, *Nuages*, mm. 5-8.



Ex. 4.32. Debussy, *Sirenes*, mm. 133-134.



Ex. 4.33. Debussy, *La mer II*, mm. 9-13.



Ex. 4.34. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 3, at 42.

The four examples above show a very interesting connection of the melodic motif together with Debussy's treatment of the English horn.

Whether or not this is an intentional design, the English horn's tritone motif



with its arching shape seems to have special significance in Debussy's orchestral works.

In the second movement of *La mer* (m. 62, see example 4.35), the solo English horn's lyrical melody is supported rhythmically by two flutes and two clarinets playing in thirds. An image with three distinct layers is suggested: the held chords of the low strings and the horns imply the unwavering horizon; the arpeggios of the bell and harp and the first violins' trills suggest a moving wave-like vista; the light stroke of the cymbal and triangle together with the pizzicato strings imply splashing waves. Although the texture is vivid and complex, all these components are presented in a soft dynamic and so, the English horn, in its comfortable middle register, is easily able to dominate the sonority. When the melody returns at measure 106, Debussy assigns it to the cellos, which on their solo A string with its intense tone color and somewhat nasal sound, corresponds to the English horn's first presentation of the melody.

Cédez un peu

The musical score is for Debussy's *La mer II*, measures 62-65. It is a full orchestral score with parts for Flute, English Horn, Clarinet, Bassoon, Oboe, Horn, Trumpet, Trombone, Cymbal, Snare Drum, and Harp. The title "Cédez un peu" is written above the first system. The score shows various musical notations including dynamics (pp, p, pp), articulation (pizz, arco), and phrasing. The English Horn part is highlighted in the first system.

Ex. 4.35. Debussy, *La mer II*, mm. 62-65.

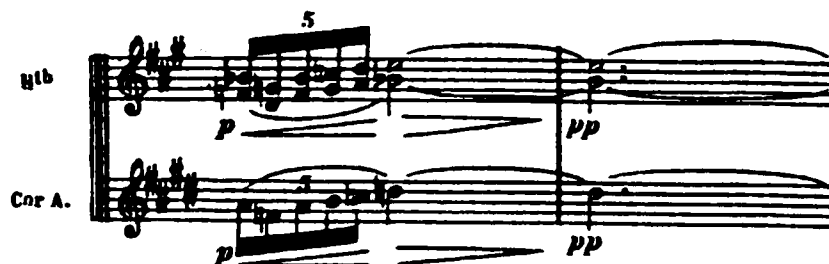
In presenting certain melodies, Debussy also uses different instrumental combinations with the English horn, most often combining it in

a woodwind *tutti* or with one or two woodwinds, particular the clarinet. A good example occurs at the third measure of *Fêtes* (see example 4.10), where the arching shape of the fluid melody is first presented in the unison of the English horn and two clarinets, with the support of the strongly percussive strings. The result is a penetrating, yet rounded, sonority that successfully blends the characteristics of both instruments.

### **Harmonic Usage**

Debussy often encloses the English horn in a woodwind *tutti* to produce a full, rich woodwind sound (as in example 8.6). Here the English horn is treated as an alto oboe, with identical expectations with respect to agility. This trio of double reeds, with a pedal B/C<sup>b</sup> in the bassoon, supplies a taut core to the woodwind choir. The lowest ranges of the English horn and the clarinet are similar and Debussy's chordal arrangement for the two instruments is appropriate for the effect. For a more blended sound, he usually positions the English horn below (or between) the clarinets and above the bassoon (as measure 27 of *Fêtes*, see example 7.4). To obtain a clear penetrating sound, Debussy often places the English horn above the clarinet (as the beginning of the second movement of *La mer*, see example 8.13). Sometimes Debussy acquires a pure double reed effect by arranging

chords for two oboes and the English horn, regarding the English horn as a third oboe (see example 4.36).

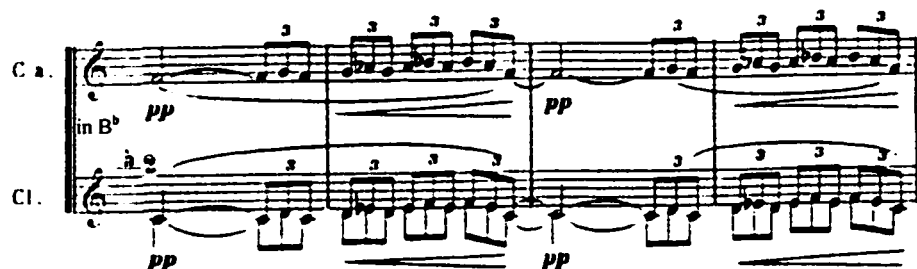


Ex. 4.36. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 130-131.

## Doubling

Debussy uses English horn doublings with other woodwinds in a flexible manner. In a large woodwind doubling, such as at measure 55 of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the English horn adds body to the ensemble without dominating it (see example 8.4).

Debussy seems to prefer the English horn combined with the clarinet at the unison, not only in multi-doublings, but also with just the two instruments paired. The doubling of single reed and double reeds can produce a neutral sound effect, as in example 4.10. Example 4.37 (found in *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 2, four measures before 25-C) shows another example of the doubling of English horn and clarinets.



Ex. 4.37. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act IV, scene 2, 4 mm. before 25-C.

Debussy will also double the English horn with the oboe and/or bassoon to obtain the sonority of pure double reeds (see example 8.14 and the discussion in the oboe's doubling). The English horn doubling with the bassoon can be found more often than the oboe doubling with the bassoon in the four works under consideration. This is probably because of the closer relation of the registers of the two instruments. At measure 103 of *Sirenes*, the siren's motif, originally sung by the female voices, here is written for the English horn and first bassoon. The English horn with its more pungent tone color dominates the sonority, and the first bassoon adds body to it.

Occasionally the English horn is used to double the strings, (see the discussion in the register section). One effective unison doubling of the English horn and two solo cellos is found at measure 122 of the first movement of *La mer*. Here, the other strings in a wide distribution (spanning five octaves) hold chords with a slow harmonic movement and soft dynamic supporting the melody. The doubling is so well designed that the cellos in a

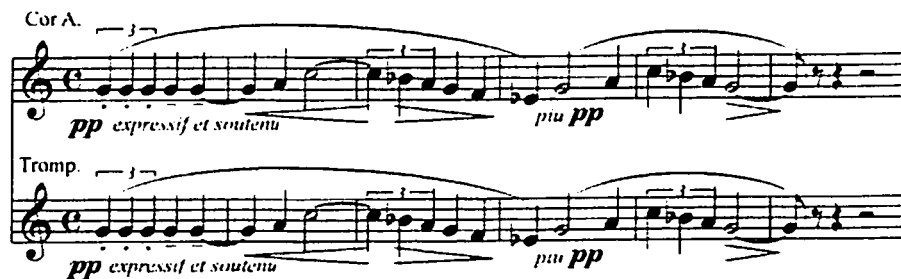
high tessitura produce a similar nasal sound to the English horn (in its characteristic middle range) providing a well-blended and distinct tone color. When the flutes appear at measure 128, their feeble tone quality (in the first octave) and the rhythmic juxtaposition of triplet with duplet add a nuance of color and produce a slight disturbance (see example 4.38).

[illegible]

Ex. 4.38. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 122-131.

Two other special doublings are worthy of mention. The first is the English horn doubling with the muted trumpet. In the introduction of the

first movement of *La mer*, the muted trumpet call is doubled by the English horn sounding at an octave lower (see example 4.39). This is a very important motif in *La mer*; it is reprised at measure 112 of the same movement and appears in the third movement as the motif of the wind. In his review of the work's first performance, Laloy described the wind motif as "melancholy call, in an instant summoning up the kingdom of the wind to our gaze."<sup>39</sup> The instruments have very similar tone color here and consequently produce a well-blended sound. In its middle range, the muted trumpet has a rather bright and round quality, to which is added the coarser, reedy sonority of the English horn.



Ex. 4.39. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 12-16.

The second example is the English horn doubling with the glockenspiel at measure 179 of the third movement of *La mer*. Here, the glockenspiel adds a tinkling tone color, and together with the piccolo gives a

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Trezise, 54.



clear rhythmic contour to the English horn, energizing the English horn's melody.

### **Special Effects**

The special doublings discussed above provide examples of Debussy's sensitive consideration of the color of this instrument. Some other special effects are revealed through his usage of the English horn.

In *Sirènes*, as discussed in the section on the oboe's special effects, the English horn is doubled by the oboe, with their grace notes imitating the sound of the seagull (see example 8.10), resulting in a very vivid mimicry of the bird's cry by the double reeds. A similar usage of the English horn's grace note is seen at measure 104 of the third movement of *La mer*. This time it is alternated with the piccolo to produce an echoing effect. In *Pelléas*, Act III, Scene II, at [33], the thirty-second note figure of the English horn and the piccolo contributes a vivid element to the complex texture. One can compare this effect to the grace notes in the third movement of *La mer*.

In *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 3, eight measures before [28], the musical background suddenly changes to a shaking effect, beginning in the clarinets, then adding the bassoons and the tremolo strings, in order to suggest a herd of sheep. A more realistic portrayal of the sheep is obtained through the clear double reed sonority of the English horn and the oboe (see example 4.30 &

5.37). Debussy's design is more delicate and implicative than Richard Strauss' use of muted brass to imitate the cry of the sheep in his orchestral work, *Don Quixote*.

Debussy's usage of the English horn in *Nuages* is also extraordinary. Debussy designed a tritone-based motif (see example 4.31) for the English horn. Apart from this motif and its six repetitions (two times with extended phrases), the English horn plays no other notes in *Nuages*; this usage is similar to the *idée fixe* or the leitmotif. As discussed in the section on the melodic usage of the English horn, this motif is used again and again in Debussy's other works. In *Nuages*, the pungent tone quality of the English horn playing the distinctive motif suggests a special color or shape of a cloud floating in the air.

### Clarinet

Two clarinets are a standard setting in the four works under consideration. Compared to his later works, Debussy's treatment of the clarinet in this period (or before) is rather conservative. However, one can still find many effective usages of this instrument in these four works. Because only two clarinets are used in the scores, when employed in a chordal setting, they are usually combined with other instruments, most

particularly double reeds. The following discussion is divided into register, melodic usage, harmonic usage, doubling and special effects.

### Register

One sees in these four works, Debussy's careful consideration of the treatment of the clarinet's register, particular in the high range. The register from  $c^2$  to  $c^3$ , so called the clarion register, has clear and bright quality and is easy to blend with the oboe or flute. Debussy often uses the clarinet's clarion register in solo passages or to double the high woodwinds. The notes higher than  $c^3$  (the *altissimo* register) become shriller; Debussy usually uses the high notes with instrumental doubling or a large *tutti*. Debussy includes  $f^3$  only in the second movement of *La mer* and does not go beyond it in the four works under consideration, despite the fact that the clarinet is capable of playing a major third higher.

The clarinet's middle register (roughly from  $f^1$  to  $b^1$ ) is termed the throat register and has less resonance; Debussy often uses it in harmonic support in his scores. Compared to the *altissimo* register, the low register (notes below  $f^1$ ), known as the *chalmereau* register, is used widely and freely in Debussy's works. The flexibility of the wide dynamic range in this register is also employed effectively by Debussy. Table 5 shows the clarinet's ranges in the four works.

In the *Prélude*, *Nuages* and the third movement of *La mer*, the highest note is never above  $c^3$ . In dealing with notes higher than  $c^3$ , Debussy usually covers them in instrumental doublings or in a tutti section to conceal the somewhat shrill tone quality of the high notes. In measures 108-109 of *Fêtes*, for example, the first clarinet plays in the *altissimo* register within a large woodwind doubling.

Table 5. Clarinet Range in the Four Works

	Lowest	Highest	key of instrument
Prélude	$g^\sharp$	$c^3$	A-B <sup>b</sup>
Nuages	$f^\sharp$	$b^{b_2}$	B <sup>b</sup>
Fêtes	$d^{b_1}$	$e^3$	B <sup>b</sup> -A
Sirènes	$g$	$e^3$	A-B <sup>b</sup>
La mer I	$e$	$d^{\sharp_3}$	A-B <sup>b</sup>
La mer II	$a$	$f^3$	A
La mer III	$f$	$c^3$	B <sup>b</sup> -A
Pelléas	$e$	$e^{b_3}$	B <sup>b</sup> -A

(in written pitch, sounding a major second or minor third lower)

One of the very few examples of the use of the high register without any doubling and in a rather simple texture appears in measures 80-81 of the second movement of *La mer* (see example 4.40). Here, a sweeping line is

shared between flutes, harp and clarinets; the flute and the clarinet sonorities match well in their high registers.

Ex. 4.40. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 80-81.

Debussy often uses the clarinet's throat and chalumeau registers to serve a harmonic function, usually combining them with the double reeds to construct a more complete chordal structure. The first chord played by the oboes and the clarinets in the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (see example 8.2) and the first chord in the second movement of *La mer* (see example 8.13) are good examples of the employment of the clarinet's middle and low registers in their chordal arrangement, combined with double reeds in both examples.

## Melodic Usage

Because of the clarinet's excellent capacity of matching with the other woodwinds, Debussy uses it widely in combination with the flute and all the double reeds in its melodic usage. In a large woodwind *tutti* (as in example 8.6), the clarinet is able to increase the full sonority. When combined with the flute (as measure 42 of the *Prélude*), the clarinet can add body to it. When doubled with the oboe or the English horn, the clarinet neutralizes the pungent tone color of the double reeds (as in example 4.25 and 4.10). In a well-blended combination at the beginning of *Nuages* (see example 4.41), two clarinets play two counter-melodic lines with two bassoons doubling at the octave; the clarinets dominate, creating a smooth background that suggests an image of soft and steady air in the sky.

The image shows a musical score for three woodwind parts: 2 Hautbois (Oboes), 2 Clarinettes Sib (Clarinet in B-flat), and 1er et 2e Bassons (First and Second Bassoons). The music is in 3/4 time and features a smooth, counter-melodic texture. The clarinet parts are marked 'pp très expressif' and the bassoon parts are marked 'pp'. The oboe part is marked 'pp' and 'très expressif'.

Ex. 4.41. Debussy, *Nuages*, mm. 1-4.

The solo usage of the clarinet in the four works somewhat reveals Debussy's view of the roles of the clarinet in his orchestration. Similar to his

usage of the other high woodwinds, to which he assigns very characteristic solo lines, Debussy often gives the clarinet a solo during a transitional passage; almost all the clarinet solos in *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* occur at significant junctures of the work. At measure 20, two clarinets echoing the previous ascending line serve as a bridge to lead back to the solo flute. At measure 30 (see example 7.1), after the cadence, the solo clarinet starts a new phrase, which becomes more agitated and excited, and gradually leads to the passionate middle section (a symbol of the faun's passion). At measure 51 (four measures before the passionate middle section), the solo clarinet again serves as the bridge, with the joining of the oboe and the flute introducing to the middle section. At measure 75 (see example 6.8), the clarinet solo is heard amid a transitional passage, which leads back to the flute solo.

In *Sirènes*, at measures 57 (see example 5.1), 124 and 130, two clarinets playing in thirds alternate with other instrumental groups to imitate the siren's motif, fulfilling a transitional role between the phrases. In the second movement of *La mer*, at measure 134, following the subsidence of the previous climax, the solo clarinet plays joking trill figures that create a new phrase to push to the ultimate high point of this movement (see example

4.42). Here, the chalumeau register and the agile property of the clarinet are displayed.



Ex. 4.42. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 134-136.

### Harmonic Usage

As discussed in the section on the clarinet register, the neutral sound of the throat (middle) register and the full, dark quality of the *chalumeau* (low) register are used frequently for harmonic support in Debussy's orchestration. In addition, the double reeds seem to be the favored instruments to combine with the clarinet in a chordal arrangement; this usage can be seen in examples 4.23, 7.4, 8.2 and 8.13. When the clarinet is combined with the oboe, Debussy tends to favor interlocking and juxtaposition (with the clarinet in the lower position). Debussy likes to place the oboe in a higher position so that the double reeds dominate the sonority. Another example of juxtaposition occurs at measure nine of the third movement of *La mer*; here the clarinets in a lower position add a round sonority to the oboes.

The combination of the clarinet and the English horn has been discussed in the section on the English horn's harmonic usage. Debussy



freely positions either instrument on the top to obtain more blended or clearer double reeds sonorities. In combining with the bassoon, Debussy usually put the clarinet above the bassoon to acquire a fuller single reed tone color, which is also a practical consideration in terms of the ranges of the two instruments.

Debussy often employs the dark, full quality of the clarinet's chalumeau register to create a deep, shady and somewhat mysterious emotional reaction. In *Pelléas*, Act II, scene 2, three measures before 17 (see example 4.43), the tone of the two clarinets' unison in their low chalumeau register combine with that of the bassoons to provide a representation of Golaud's recall of an inexplicable encounter in the forest. Here, the high dynamic level (from *f* to *sf*) suggests dramatic surprise. In general, the combination of the clarinet's chalumeau register with the bassoon's low register has a similar quality as the horns in a close harmonic structure. Late Romantic composers such as Brahms and Tchaikovsky had already exploited these sonorities.

Cl.

Hr.

Gu.

Vcl.

C.B.

*sf* *p* *dim.* *mullu*

*pizz* *arco* *p* *dim.*

Mon cheval s'est empor-té tout à coup, sans raison.

Ex. 4.43. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act II, scene 2, three mm. before 17.

Two clarinets playing in thirds as a harmonic support is seen often in the four works. This arrangement produces a dense sonority. At measure 62 of the second movement of *La mer* (see example 4.35), two clarinets playing in thirds combine with two flutes in a high register, their staccato articulation provides both a harmonic and rhythmic background to the solo English horn. Clarinets and flutes blend very well in the high register. A very similar arrangement of the three instruments occurs in *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 3, at 29 (see example 4.44). Here, the articulation of the clarinets and the flutes is legato, instead of staccato, but the triplet figure remains the same as before, with the same function of rhythmic and harmonic support for the solo English horn.

Ex. 4.44. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 3, at 29.

## Doubling

Debussy uses the clarinet to double each of the woodwinds. From the flute to the double reeds, the clarinet is seen doubling either with one or multiple woodwinds. When doubled with the flute (unison or octave doubling), the clarinet can add body to its tone (see example 4.9). When doubled with the oboe or English horn, the clarinet is able to neutralize the pungent quality of the double reeds (see example 4.10 & 4.25). The clarinet doubling with the bassoon can produce a blended sonority (see example 4.41).

Occasionally the clarinet is seen doubled with the strings. In *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 1, five measures after 15, two solo violins in octaves (with the clarinet doubling the lower octave) perform a lyrical melody that reflects Pelléas' loving and cherishing of Mélisande's long hair. Here, the tension of the solo violin in its high register arouses an affectionate emotion. The other solo violin, together with the clarinet at an octave below, reinforces the

melody. The clarinet, mostly in its clear and bright clarion register, adds to the melody a wider contour and provides a somewhat softer effect (see example 8.20).

### **Special Effects**

The use of the clarinet solo at a changing point or during a transitional passage (as discussed in its melodic usage) is one of the special functions Debussy reserves for this instrument. One other special effect is the utilization of the clarinet's chalumeau register to illustrate a moment of surprise (see example 4.43 and the discussion of the example from *Pelléas* in the clarinet's harmonic usage).

Debussy uses various figures to produce a wave effect. In *Sirènes*, two different types of figuration in the clarinet suggest the waves. The first is the arching arpeggios in the first two measures, where the solo clarinet plays a fast and short pattern to imply a small wave (see example 8.8). At measure 3, the wave motion is intensified (see example 4.14). The second is the descending arpeggios from measure 103. Here, the clarinet figuration is combined with the flutes to produce the wave effect. The one octave range of the descending arpeggios is enlarged to two octaves from measure 107, and increased by adding the second clarinet to harmonize the first clarinet from measure 115.

## Bassoon

The bassoon is the bass member of the woodwind family. Unlike the high double reeds (oboe and English horn) with their more pungent and nasal qualities, the bassoon has a more versatile sound quality, which is easily blended with any of the other instruments. In the four works under consideration, Debussy uses the bassoon mainly in a supporting function, although melodic usages and some solo passages are called for.

### Register

Debussy seems to prefer the dark and full sound of bassoon's low register. The lowest note of the bassoon, BB<sup>b</sup> is used many times in both *La mer* and *Pelléas*. The instrument's low register is employed very effectively, not only in its many harmonic supporting usages, but in the rare cases of solo passages, such as the wind motif at measure 98 of the third movement of *La mer* (see example 4.45). Here, the *pizzicato* cellos double the bassoons to reinforce the bouncing effect.



Ex. 4.45. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 98-101.

Debussy's usage of the bassoon's high register is rather conservative when compared to his use of the low register. The highest note appearing in the four works is  $b^1$  (in *Pelléas*). Although the  $b^1$  does not even reach the extremity of the instrument's range (at least a major third higher could be obtained), the bassoon's notes are usually enclosed within a large woodwind ensemble or doubled with other instruments. One of these examples is in Act V, at [13], where the second bassoon doubles the first bassoon at an octave lower, with the cellos in two-part *divisi* dominating the melody (see example 4.46). The bassoons here add body to the cellos.



Ex. 4.46. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act V, at [13].

Debussy uses the bassoon's middle register, with its easy and neutral sound quality, widely to combine melodically and harmonically with other instruments. Good examples of Debussy's employment of this range are found in his use of the second bassoon in the beginning of *Nuages* (see example 4.41) or two bassoons as the base of the first chord of the second

movement of *La mer* (see example 8.13). Table 6 shows the bassoon's extreme ranges in the four works.

Table 6. Bassoon Range in the Four Works

	Lowest	Highest
Prélude	$D^b$	$a^1$
Nuages	$E$	$a^{b_1}$
Fêtes	$BB$	$a^1$
Sirènes	$D^b$	$a^1$
La mer I	$BB^b$	$b^{b_1}$
La mer II	$BB^b$	$a^{\#_1}$
La mer III	$C$	$a^{\#_1}$
Pelléas	$BB^b$	$b^1$

### Melodic Usage

Not many solo melodies are assigned to the bassoon in the four works, and most of them are short with a transitional function. In *Nuages*, at measure 94, the bassoons recall the beginning motif with a modified fragment, which is then quickly assumed by the cellos (see example 4.47). Here the two instruments serve a transitional function leading to the ending, passing through the pentatonic motif (in the flute) and the tri-tone motif (in the horns). One other example from *Fêtes* (measure 257) also shows the

transitional usage of the solo bassoon. Here the bassoon is alternating with the oboe to produce an effect of exchanging color.



Ex. 4.47. Debussy, *Nuages* mm. 94-96.

In the third movement of *La mer*, at measure 98 (see example 4.45), the whole tone-based melody, previously announced by the muted trumpet (at measure 31) is taken by three bassoons in unison and doubled by *pizzicato* cellos. Here the bassoons in their low register with staccato articulation produce a full, deep and distinctive sonority that dominates the melody; the *pizzicato* cellos add a bouncing character. Such a long melodic line dominated by the bassoons is not often to be found in the four works under consideration.

A whole tone-based motif taken by three bassoons in unison appears again in *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 2, at 27 (see example 4.48). Here the bassoon's low register takes on an even darker effect because of the legato figure and slow tempo. With the support of the low horn's held pitch and the



soft tremolo timpani, the bassoons' somewhat mysterious whole tone-based melody in their dark, full low register provides an image of the shadowy, deep and unknown atmosphere of the castle's vaults.

27

Bassoon

Horn

Timpani

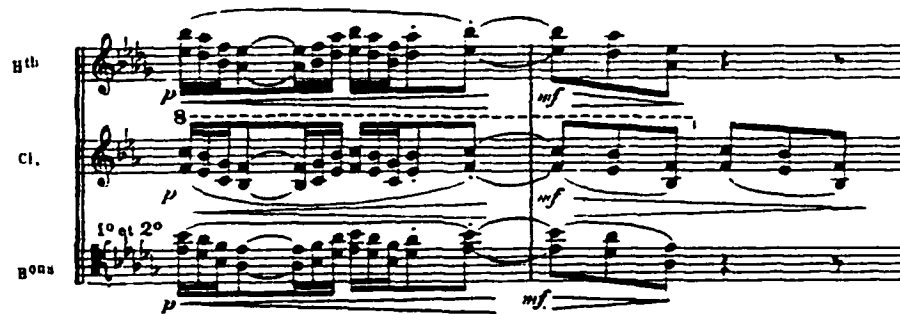
Gogo

Pre-nez gar de.

Ex. 4.48. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 2, at 27.

The bassoon's neutral sound quality is easily absorbed by other instruments. Many of the bassoon's melodic usages are in a supporting role to add body to the instruments that double it. The combination of two bassoons with two clarinets in the beginning of *Nuages* (see example 4.41) illustrates this. At measure 44 of the first movement of *La mer*, the oboes and clarinets restate the pentatonic motif with the bassoons doubling at an

octave lower (see example 4.49). The bassoons here reinforce the melodic line and also extend the sound to a lower octave.



Ex. 4.49. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 41-42.

At measure 39 of *Fêtes*, two bassoons are combined with the horns (see example 4.50). Here, the first and the third horns in unison in a higher register dominate the melody, with the bassoons and the other two horns, also in unison, in a lower register reinforcing the sonority. The horns and the bassoons in their middle high register, having a similar tone color, create a full and blended effect. Composers have exploited this effect as far back as the Classical Era, when natural horns, with their limited possibilities of open pitches, were often supplemented by bassoons.

à2

Bassoon

*très marqué*

2

Horns

*f très marqué*

2

*f très marqué*

2

Ex. 4.50. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 39-41.

### Harmonic Usage

Because no bass clarinet is used in the four works, the bassoon (or contrabassoon in the third movement of *La mer*) serves as the lowest instrument of the woodwinds. In a woodwind *tutti*, the bassoon is usually used as the bass to support the upper melodies; this function is illustrated in *Fêtes*, at measures 140 (see example 8.6) and 182.

Debussy uses the bassoon as an important harmonic instrument because of its neutral sound quality, which easily blends with other instruments. Although the bassoon is widely combined with various instruments to serve in a harmonic function, the clarinets, horns, English horn and low strings are most often used to combine with the bassoon. As discussed in the section on the clarinet's harmonic usage, the bassoon and

the clarinet combined in their low register can produce a dark and full sound; this is often used in *Pelléas* (see example 4.43).

The bassoon combined with the horns produce a well-blended sonority as is seen in example 4.50. Another example from *Pelléas* shows this usage; at the beginning of Act II, scene 2 (see example 4.51), after the first E<sup>b</sup> major chord, three bassoons and four horns in close structure powerfully present two parallel triad chords, E<sup>b</sup> and D<sup>b</sup>. The strings in three-octave doublings and contrary motion support the two chords. The chordal combination of the bassoons and the horns creates a strong and full sonority, which is used to imply a solemn scene at the castle. At the third measure, three bassoons in unison, in their low register, are combined with the low strings and supported by the strong articulated violins and violas to continue the strong musical demands.

Décidé et très rude

3 FLÛTES

2 HAUTBOIS

1 COR ANGLAIS

2 CLARINETTES EN SI $\flat$

3 BASSONS

4 CORNS EN FA

TROMBONS

**16 RIDEAU**

VIOLONS

ALTOS

VIOLONCELLES

CONTREBASSES

*f marcato*

*f marcato*

*pizz*

*arco*

*pizz*

*arco*

*pizz*

*arco*

*pizz*

Ex. 4.51. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act II, scene 2, beginning.

Occasionally one finds the bassoons in a chordal arrangement without combining with other instruments. In the third movement of *La mer*, at measure 22, the contrabassoon and three bassoons construct a complete harmonic structure producing a somewhat coarse sound effect (see example 4.52). Here, the staccato low strings and tremolo bass drum help to activate the background.

Ex. 4.52. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 22-23.

## Doubling

As discussed above, Debussy uses the bassoon widely in combination with other instruments, and most often with the clarinet, horn, English horn and low strings. Example 4.41 again shows the clarinets doubled by the bassoons at an octave lower, the bassoons blending to the clarinet and adding body to its sonority. Example 4.51 shows the doublings of the bassoons with the horns.

At measure 15 of *Fêtes*, cellos and two bassoons in unison play the arching melody with the flutes, clarinets, violins and violas supporting rhythmically and harmonically (see example 4.53). The basses' ostinato

tritone figure also adds a distinct harmonic element to the texture. Doublings of the bassoon and the cello are often found in the four works because of their well-blended effect and they tend to dominate the sonority. In the second movement of *La mer* (measures 199-218), an unusually long passage of bassoons and cellos doubling occurs. Their parts here serve as a counter melody submerged under the main melody of the upper strings.

The image displays a musical score for measures 15 and 16 of Debussy's *Fêtes*. The score is written for eight instruments: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in E, Bassoon, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The music is marked *p* (piano). The Flute, Oboe, and Clarinet in E parts are identical, playing a melodic line with triplets and slurs. The Bassoon part plays a similar melodic line, often doubling the Cello. The Violin II, Viola, and Cello parts play a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and triplets. The Contrabass part plays a simple bass line with slurs and triplets. The overall texture is dense and layered, with the double reed instruments (Bassoon and Oboe) providing a counter melody to the upper strings.

Ex. 4.53. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 15-16.

To produce a full double reed effect, Debussy often doubles the bassoon with the oboe and the English horn. A good example occurs at

measure 56 of the third measure of *La mer* (see example 8.14 and refer to the discussion in the oboe's doubling). At measure 103 of *Sirènes*, the first bassoon doubles the English horn to play the motif of the sirens. Here, the more nasal effect of the English horn dominates the sound, and the bassoon adds body to it.

Except in a multiple doubling, the bassoon's doubling with high woodwind is not common in the four works. One of the few examples is seen at measure 179 of the second movement of *La mer* (see example 4.27), where the oboe's nasal tone color dominates the sonority and the bassoon, at an octave lower, adds body to the oboe.

### **Special Effects**

As noted in the discussion of the oboe's special effects, the oboe, English horn and the bassoon alternate grace notes to imitate the sound of the seagull in *Sirènes* (see example 8.10); this use of double reeds produces a very vivid effect. In *Fêtes*, at measure 233, the first bassoon sustaining in its neutral middle register is clearly heard above the chromatic moving low strings. With the combination of the snare drum and *pizzicato* violas, the bassoon's grace note effect is distinct (see example 4.54). This motif is repeated at measures 240 and 248; the snare drum and violas are left out in the second repetition to produce a change of color.



Ex. 4.54. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 233-235.

In *Pelléas*, the bassoon is often used to imply a mysterious scene, a gloomy atmosphere, or as a symbol of the character, Golaud. Example 4.48 shows the usage of the bassoon's dark, full tone color to provide a suggestion of the murky air of the castle's vault.

### Contrabassoon

In the four works, Debussy only uses the contrabassoon in the third movement of *La mer*, mainly to extend the woodwind's low register and to construct a fuller sound effect of the bassoon family. The range of the contrabassoon used in this work is primarily focused within an octave, from *FF* to *F* (*E<sup>#</sup>*).

The contrabassoon is used only rarely as a melodic instrument. The longer and more impressive melody occurs at measure 110 (see example 4.55), where the contrabassoon and the horns join the bassoons and the low strings to play the wind motif. The bassoons and contrabassoon in a three-octave doubling provide a full sonority, with the horns and low strings (also in a three octave doubling) to reinforce the effect. The clear articulation of these instruments creates a distinct melodic contour.

The image displays a musical score for measures 110-113 of Debussy's *La mer III*. The score is arranged in six staves, labeled on the left as '1<sup>re</sup> Basson', '2<sup>e</sup> Basson', 'C. Basson', 'Corno', 'Vc.', and 'D.B.'. The 'C. Basson' and 'Corno' staves show a melodic line with various notes and rests, while the 'Vc.' and 'D.B.' staves provide a harmonic foundation. The '1<sup>re</sup> Basson' and '2<sup>e</sup> Basson' staves also contribute to the harmonic texture. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f*, and articulation marks like accents and slurs. The overall texture is rich and layered, with the Contrabassoon and Horns playing a prominent melodic role in the lower register.

Ex. 4.55. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 110-113.

Debussy treats the contrabassoon as the bass to support the upper voices in a harmonic context. Whether as the lowest part in the bassoon family or in the woodwinds, or combined with the low strings or horns to support the whole orchestra, the contrabassoon is consistently used to firmly anchor the instrumental sonority.

## CHAPTER V

### WRITING FOR BRASS AND PERCUSSION

Although on occasion, Debussy uses the brass to produce a splendid, brilliant effect, such as in the big ending of *La mer*, mostly, the brass is employed subtly. Observe his advice to Charles Levadé, winner of the Prix de Rome in 1889: "the brass are to be handled with extreme delicacy and are not instruments of bloodshed! Only in the ultimate extremity should a trombone blare..."<sup>40</sup>

In the four works being studied, four horns are consistently employed. In *Prélude*, with the exception of the horns, no other brass is used, which indicates a woodwind-based design of orchestration. Three trumpets, three trombones and tuba are employed in movement two (*Fêtes*) of *Nocturnes*, movements one and three of *La mer* and *Pelléas*. In the third movement of *La mer*, two cornets are added for a specific sonority. As trumpets in Debussy's time were also chromatic, the distinction between natural trumpets and chromatic cornets, such as Berlioz employed, was not a

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<sup>40</sup> François Lesure and Roger Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, trans. By Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 140.

consideration here. Table 7 shows the brass setting in the four works under examination.

Table 7. Brass Setting in the Four Works

	Prélude	Nocturnes	La mer	Pelléas
Horn	4	4	4	4
Trumpet		3	5*	3
Trombone		3	3	3
Tuba		1	1	1

\*three trumpets and two cornets

### **Horn**

From the point of view of construction and playing technique, the horn is clearly a brass instrument, but it is widely used to blend with the woodwind family. Its wide range of dynamics and neutral tone quality enables the horn to blend easily with either the brass or woodwinds. Debussy uses the horn as an important harmonic instrument and also assigns characterized melodies for it. He employs specific techniques such as stopping notes, brassy sound, and quick dynamic change in his scores to achieve special effects. In the four works (actually almost all of the complete orchestral works), Debussy employs four horns. Because of the four-horn setting, an independent chordal arrangement could be obtained when necessary. In many cases, Debussy uses the horns independently to produce

a pure horn sonority. He also uses the horns widely to combine with other instruments. The following discussion is divided into register, melodic usage, harmonic usage, doubling and special effects.

### **Register**

The modern horn, as used by Debussy, is an F transposing instrument (sounding a perfect fifth lower than written). Before the early twentieth century, composers, when writing for the horn in the bass clef, usually wrote an octave lower than when writing in the treble clef, which results in the horn sounding a perfect fourth higher than written. The old notation system is now abandoned, and whether written on the treble or bass clef, the sounding notes are always a perfect fifth lower than written. In the four works being examined, Debussy uses the old notation system. Table 8 shows the extreme range of the horn in the four works.

The register Debussy employs most for the horn is its middle to lower high range, about two octaves from  $g$  to  $g^2$  (the ranges in *Nuages* and *Sirènes* span no more than two octaves). This is the horn's most comfortable and characteristic register. Whether used melodically or harmonically, this register has clarity and ease of projection. Debussy rarely writes notes beyond  $g^2$ ; when he does, they are often accompanied by instrumental doublings, or enclosed in a *tutti* texture to avoid the somewhat shrill sound.

The highest note,  $b^{b_2}$ , in the four works being studied, appears once at measure 90 of the first movement of *La mer*. Here a four-part divided cello section dominates the musical texture with four horns in support. The horn's  $a^{b_2}$  and  $b^{b_2}$  are not obtrusive.

Table 8. Horn Range in the Four Works

	Lowest	Highest
Prélude	$BB$	$g^{\#_2}$
Nuages	$b$	$f^{\#_2}$
Fêtes	$BB$	$f^{\#_2}$
Sirènes	$b^b$	$g^2$
La mer I	$C$	$b^{b_2}$
La mer II	$BB$	$g^{\#_2}$
La mer III	$E^b$	$g^2$
Pelléas	$BB$	$a^2$

(the capitalized notes, written on the bass clef, sounding a perfect fourth higher, the small letter notes sounding a perfect fifth lower)

The horn's bottom register is rather soft and lacks clarity in melodic passages. When Debussy uses notes in this register, mostly writing in the bass clef, he usually writes slow moving notes, which primarily have a harmonic function. As in the *Prélude*, at measure 21, the written  $BB$  is used to support the root of the E chord.

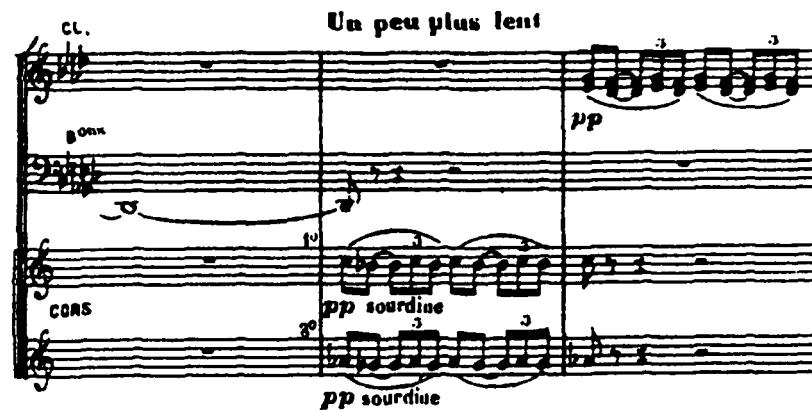
## Melodic Usage

Although Debussy did not use the horn melodically as he does with the high woodwinds in their exuberant solo passages and melodic functions, he gives a considerable weight of melodic usage to the horn. Mostly the horn's melodic usage is to serve as a change of color or to add a tone color to the ensemble. In the *Prélude*, at measure 74 (see example 6.8), the first horn serves as a bridge, assuming the melody from the first violins and the cellos, and transferring it to the clarinet then to the oboe. Debussy's predilection for distributing a melody or figure between several instruments to produce a change of color is again seen in this example. Here the musical line is transferred from the horn's broader sound, gradually to the clarinet's contracted tone, then to the oboe's nasal character. Combined with the gradual ascending pitch, tension is also built into the process of the instrumental alternation.

In *Fêtes*, from measure 148 to 151, a powerful statement scored for four interlocking horns alternates with the woodwind *tutti*. The broad sonority of the horns, in a *forte* dynamic, balances well with the woodwinds.

In *Sirènes*, Debussy also uses the horns in many transitional passages, particularly in the exchange of the motif of the Sirens. At measure 56, two muted horns play a fragment of the Sirens' motif, which is then transferred

to the clarinets (see example 5.1). The shift of instruments from the horns to the clarinets is the same as in the *Prélude* (m.74) just discussed above, but here without the change of the pitch. The narrower tone color of the muted horns effects a change of timbre that is rather subtler than in the *Prélude*.



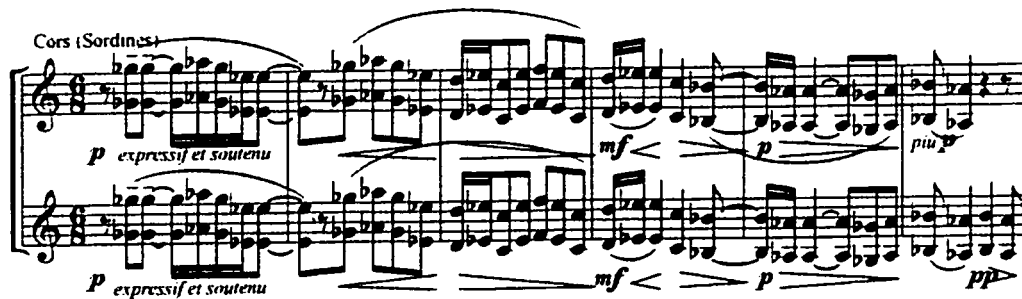
Ex. 5.1. Debussy, *Sirènes*, mm. 55-57.

In *La mer*, one can find many melodic usages of the horns serving a transitional function. At measures 50 and 54 of the second movement, three horns, playing parallel augmented triads, alternate with the harps' glissandos to construct a bridge between the string-dominated and woodwind-dominated sections. Although the horns' broad tone color softens the edgy tendency of the augmented triads, it does produce a somewhat mysterious effect (see example 6.26).

Apart from this transitional usage, Debussy creates some very characteristic melodies for the horns. In the first movement of *La mer*, after



the introduction, four muted horns doubling at the octave take the melody in the first principal section (example 5.2). This melody is the second motif in this section and is extraordinary in its construction: a mixed mode based on raised fourth (Lydian) and lowered seventh (Mixolydian). This motif is only given to the horns. Among the three appearances (at measures 35, 53 and 69) of this motif, only the third, uncompleted, is doubled with two bassoons at the end of the motif. Without any development, the octave doubling of the horns' motif provides a firm sound, and combined with the mixed modes it evokes a sense of the exotic.



Ex. 5.2. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 35-40.

At measure 133 of the third movement of *La mer*, a chorale appears, which is very unusual in Debussy's orchestral works (example 5.3). Here, a complete and integrated four-part harmony in the four horns' clear middle register produces solid sonorities. The fingered tremolos of the low strings provide a dim recollection of the waves. At the end of the phrase, the

bassoons and the solo trumpet reinforce the harmony, and the eight solo violins in two parts delicately build a bridge for the return of the chorale.

Ex. 5.3. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 133-138.

In *Pelléas*, Debussy designs a special motivic usage for the horns. In "Claude Debussy and Twentieth-Century Music", Wenk regards the horn as the symbolic instrument of Golaud.<sup>41</sup> He also observes the motif floating between two neighboring notes, first appearing in the oboe and English horn at measure 5 (example 4.23) as the theme of Golaud or as a representation of fate.<sup>42</sup> With many variants, this motif permeates the whole opera, suggesting

<sup>41</sup> Arthur Wenk, *Claude Debussy and Twentieth-Century Music* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 44.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

a fateful mood dominating the realm of Allemonde. Its characteristic of vacillation in both notes and rhythm suggests the suspicious personality of Golaud. The motif is first given to the horns at three measures after [2], and afterward a close connection between the horns and the motif with its variants is established.

### **Harmonic Usage**

Used harmonically, the horn, with its broad tone, is easily combined with woodwinds, brass or strings. Special techniques such as stopping and the brassy sound (*cuivré*) add distinctive color to Debussy's orchestral canvas.

When the horn is combined with other instruments, Debussy seems to prefer the bassoon because of the timbral affinity of the two instruments. A good example of this combination appears in *Pelléas*, the beginning of Act II, scene 2 (see example 4.51 and the discussion of the bassoon's harmonic usage). In *Fêtes*, at measure 5, two horns and two bassoons play sustained notes in unison to support the active melody of the English horn and clarinet unison and the rhythmic figure of the violins. At the next measure, the horns, increasing to a *fortissimo* dynamic, reinforced by the other two horns and the accented bassoons, support the crescendo of the music. At measure 17, two stopped horns, in octave doubling, strongly punctuate the last note of the

arching melodic line. Here, the stopped horns, with *sforzando* dynamic producing a brassy sound, together with the bassoon's *sforzando* rough tone color provide strong articulation to the passage. The rough, brassy sonorities, repeated at measure 21 (see example 5.4), also vividly suggest a blaring instrument from the crowd, as contrasted with the disciplined military band that follows.

The image shows a musical score for measures 21-23 of Debussy's *Fêtes*. The score is written for a brass section, including parts for Horns (1st and 2nd), Trumpets, Trombones, and Timpani. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into three measures. In measure 21, the Horns play a sustained note with a *sforzando* dynamic. The Trumpets and Trombones play a series of notes, with the Trumpets playing in a high register. The Timpani plays a single note. In measure 22, the Horns continue their sustained note. The Trumpets and Trombones play a series of notes, with the Trumpets playing in a high register. The Timpani plays a single note. In measure 23, the Horns play a sustained note with a *sforzando* dynamic. The Trumpets and Trombones play a series of notes, with the Trumpets playing in a high register. The Timpani plays a single note.

Ex. 5.4. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 21-23.

A sparkling brass dominated section is not often seen in the four works being studied. Two of the examples will be discussed here. In *Fêtes*, at measure 170 (see example 5.5), the high point of the middle section, the first trumpet in its brilliant high register prominently states the main melody.

The horns at the lower octave and the other brass construct a powerful support to reinforce the melody. In the third movement of *La mer*, at measure 258 (see example 5.12), two trumpets in unison dominate the chorale melody (first presented at measure 133 by the horns). The chordal setting of the horns and low brass again give strong harmonic support. Together, these two examples show the typical harmonic supporting role of the horns.

The image shows a musical score for brass instruments, specifically horns and trumpets, from Debussy's *Fêtes*, measures 170-173. The score is written for six parts: two horns (CORS) and four trumpets (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th). The notation is in 2/4 time and features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, as well as sustained notes. The dynamics are marked as *ff* (fortissimo) and *très soutenu* (very sustained). The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Ex. 5.5. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 170-173.

Occasionally, Debussy uses one or two horns playing a single note to add a color or to sustain a harmony. The low *BB* is the lowest note in the four works being studied. When it appears, it is always in a sustaining note figure serving as the bass of the harmony (such as in the *Prélude*, at measure 21, 26 and 94-99).

In the second movement of *La mer*, at measure 130 (see example 5.6), two horns double with the *pizzicato* violins to add color and also to intermittently articulate the harp's regular pulse. Here the horns produce a mild stopping sound (*bouchez sans dureté*), with a little accent, doubling the violins' open D string *pizzicato*. The attack of the stopped horns matches the violins' *pizzicato*; the vibration of the strings also give an appropriate prolongation and decay to match the horns' resonance.

The musical score for measures 130-131 of Debussy's *La mer II* features four staves. The top two staves are for Horns (labeled 'Corns'), with the instruction 'bouchez (sans dureté)' and 'p >' above them. The third staff is for Harp (labeled '1re et 2de Harpen'), with a '6' above it. The bottom two staves are for Violins (labeled 'VI.'), with 'pizz(à vide)' and 'sfz' above them. A tempo change 'au Mouvt (112 = ♩)' is indicated between the Harp and Violin staves.

Ex. 5.6. Debussy, *La mer II*, mm. 130-131.

When Debussy uses the horns alone to serve a harmonic role, he seems to prefer an interlocking arrangement, the first and third horns playing the upper two notes and the second and fourth horns playing the lower two

notes. This arrangement can be traced back to Beethoven's similar usage of three horns with the second horn playing the lowest part in his Third Symphony. At measures 31 and 34 of the *Prélude*, one finds the horns interlocking in a chordal setting (see example 7.1).

### Doubling

Apart from the combination of horn with bassoon as discussed above, the horn is sometimes used to double with other instruments. One of its effective doublings is in the second movement of *La mer*, at measure 92, where the piccolo is used to double the horn (see example 7.8).

Also, the horn is occasionally used to double the English horn and oboe. At measure 60 of the third movement of *La mer*, the oboe in its high register dominates the sea motif, with the English horn and the first horn doubling at one octave lower. Here, the horn's broader sound contributes a wider contour to the pinched quality of the double reeds (see example 5.7).

Ex. 5.7. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 60-61.

Sporadically we find horns doubling violins, such as in the discussion of the harmonic usage. Another example is in the third movement of *La mer*, at measure 203, where the horns playing in thirds double the violins, also in thirds. The effect is that both groups retain their individual tone color, while the warm character of the G string blends with the warm sonority of the horns (see example 5.8).

The image shows a musical score for measures 203-205 of Debussy's *La mer* III. It consists of four staves. The top two staves are for Horns (labeled 'Cora') and the bottom two are for Violins (labeled 'VI.'). The Horns part is marked with *ff* and *f* dynamics, with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The Violins part is marked with *ff vibrato* and *f* dynamics, also with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The tempo is marked 'au Mouvt' and the key signature has one flat.

Ex. 5.8. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 203-205.

### Special Effects

The horn's distinctive solo passages and the special instrumental combinations discussed above show Debussy's idiomatic approach to the horn in his orchestration. Some other extraordinary effects given to the horn are presented below.



Debussy likes to create a sense of space in his orchestral works; one example is the echo effect, such as at measure 245 of the second movement of *La mer*, where the trumpet and piccolo echo the oboe (example 4.4). At measure 4 of the *Prélude*, the first horn, following the first chord of the oboes and clarinets, softly presents a sound coming from the distance. The harp's glissando provides a dream-like image. At the next measure, the swell of the first horn implies an approach and then recession, which is imitated by the third horn to create a distant echo. Furthermore, the empty measure that follows highlights the receding horn calls and returns us to the pensive ambience of the Faun. The somewhat hollow timbre of a horn playing at an unforced dynamic creates a psychological sense of distance (see example 8.2 and 8.3).

Debussy uses horn calls similarly in the tritone calls in *Nuages*. In its first appearance, at measure 24 (see example 6.6), the low strings echo it (expanding the tritone to a perfect fifth); the rest of the three entrances (m. 81, 86 and 99) are repeated by the horns themselves. These calls remain in a soft dynamic and the last entrance is made even softer by the employment of the mute, again providing a sense of distance.

Similar effects with horn calls occur at the beginning of *Sirènes* (see example 8.8), where the first horn, harmonized by the second horn and the

third horn's inversion, presents the sirens' call from the distance. The supposed sirens' sound—female voices—alternating with the horn calls suggest the approach of the sound from the distance.

The iambic motif of the horn call in *Sirènes*, also occurs in *La mer* and *Pelléas*. Sometimes the motif transforms to a grace note figure, such as in the second movement of *La mer* (mm. 71 and 147). At measure 94 of the third movement of *La mer*, the horn calls suggest powerful gusts of wind, with the strings' ostinato figure representing the waves (see example 8.15). This image is clearly implied by the title of the movement, *Dialogue du vent et de la mer*.

Apart from using the horn to create a sense of space, Debussy specifies muted, stopped, and brassy horn timbres to produce different effects. A mute inserted into the bell of a horn reduces the volume of the sound and also generates a veiled effect when played softly. At measure 107 of the *Prélude*, two muted horns, playing a passage in chromatic thirds, combine with the first violins in their low register (example 8.5). Here the two groups, in a close structure of chordal arrangement and a very soft dynamic, blend well yet retain their individual tone color. The muted horns in a higher register dominate the melody. Their veiled sonority very

appropriately implies the shadow of the nymphs in Mallarmé's poem

("Couple, adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins.").

Four measures before the end of *Nuages*, the horns' last tritone calls are muted, in a soft dynamic, with the *pizzicato* upper strings lightly, but clearly, providing definition to the horns' snapped rhythm. A combination of the muted horn with a brassy effect is occasionally employed in the four works being studied. This tends to produce a pinched sound with a metallic and somewhat nasal effect. Debussy, when demanding this effect, usually clearly indicates "*cuivrez*" in a muted horn passage. In *Fêtes*, at measure 260, the muted horns, playing specified "*cuivrez*" ("brassy"), combined with the sudden change of dynamic of the strings to produce a quick shift of color and energy (see example 5.9). A few measures later, the horns are required to play even more softly, yet with a brassy sound. This lightly adds their tone color to the soft atmosphere, but is difficult to achieve technically.



Ex. 5.10. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 94-95.

A combined usage of muted horn and stopped, brassy horn occurs at measure 107 of *Sirènes*. Here, the fourth horn, indicated "*cuivrez bouché*", combines with the other muted horns to articulate the pulse and to refine the bassoon's grace note (see example 5.11).



Ex. 5.11. Debussy, *Sirènes*, mm. 107-108.

The above discussions show Debussy's specific demands for the tone color of the horn. Furthermore, he gives detailed and delicate indications to the horn, when a special sound quality is called for; for example, at measure 130 of the second movement of *La mer*, “*bouchez sans dureté*” (“stop without harshness”) is indicated. At measure 115 of *Sirènes*, “*cuivrez sans dureté*” (“brassy without harshness”) is marked. In *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 3, two measures before 43, “*légèrement cuivre*” (“lightly brassy”) is shown.

### Trumpet

The trumpet has a bright tone color. Its traditional usages, such as fanfare and signaling, are effective and favored by composers in every period, including Debussy. In a big tutti passage, such as the chorale passage at measure 258 of the third movement of *La mer*, the trumpet's brilliant, brassy property can easily transcend the orchestral texture, creating a splendid phenomenon (see example 5.12).

à 2 — 3 —

*f* très sombre mais sans dureté

à 2 — 3 —

1 & 2 Tromp.

*f* très sombre mais sans dureté

3 Tromb.

*f* très sombre mais sans dureté

Tuba

*f*

*p*

Ex. 5.12. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 258-265.

The trumpet is also an excellent solo instrument due to its bright tone color. When employed with a straight mute, the volume is reduced and the instrument produces a somewhat nasal sound. This special tone color is often used in Debussy's orchestral works.

Among the four works being studied, Debussy omitted the trumpet only from the *Prélude* and the first movement of *Nocturnes (Nuages)*. In the works in which trumpet is included, his use of the instrument is economic and effective. In these works, Debussy wrote for F trumpet, which was the first trumpet with valves. Although it is not commonly used and is

superceded by the B<sup>b</sup> or C trumpets nowadays, composers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Strauss and Mahler, all employ the F trumpet. The following study is divided into register, melodic usage, harmonic usage and special effect. The doubling usage is incorporated into these studies.

### Register

In the works being considered, Debussy consistently uses F trumpet, sounding a fourth higher than written. Debussy employs mostly the trumpet's comfortable middle register and never goes beyond a written e<sup>2</sup> in these works. Table 9 shows the extreme range in these works.

Table 9. Trumpet range in the Three Works.

	Lowest	Highest
Fêtes	<i>g<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>e<sup>2</sup></i>
Sirènes	<i>a</i>	<i>c<sup>#2</sup></i>
La mer I	<i>f<sup>#</sup></i>	<i>d<sup>2</sup></i>
La mer II	<i>g</i>	<i>d<sup>#2</sup></i>
La mer III	<i>a</i>	<i>d<sup>#2</sup></i>
Pelléas	<i>e<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>e<sup>2</sup></i>

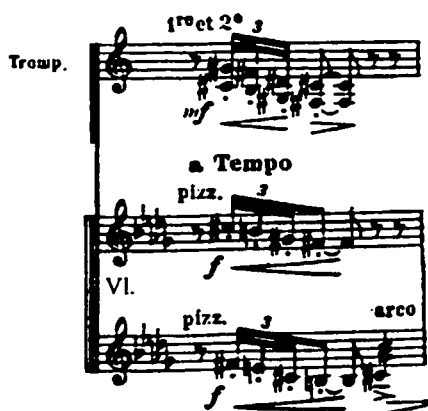
(as written, sounding a fourth higher)

The trumpet's high register has more tension, which can produce a strong and penetrating sound effect. In *Fêtes*, at measure 170, Debussy uses



the first trumpet in its high register to dominate the sonority, with all the other brass supporting, to produce a brilliant, brassy effect, which powerfully proclaims the high point of the middle section (see example 5.5).

The trumpet's low register tends to be rather rough. Debussy usually uses the trumpet's low register in a harmonic role, and often groups it with the other trumpets. At measure 77 of the first movement of *La mer*, two trumpets playing in parallel fifths, doubled by the *pizzicato* violins, powerfully extend the strength after the strong *tutti*. Here the second trumpet, in its low register, supports and extends the first trumpet's strong timbre; the *pizzicato* violins add their rebounding effects to blend with the trumpets' staccato articulation (see example 5.13).



Ex. 5.13. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 77.

One of the rare but effective usages of the trumpet's low register appears at measure eight of the second movement of *La mer*. Here, two

muted trumpets alternate to play the low *g* (written). The muted trumpets' fast staccato sixteenth figures in their rough low register produce an energetic and penetrating sound effect, which vividly suggests an image of the clapping sound of a gull's wings (see example 8.13).

### **Melodic Usage**

Debussy's usage of the trumpet in its melodic function is very distinctive. He creates many characteristic melodies for the trumpet in the works being studied. In most of the works, a tendency towards a fixed treatment of the trumpet's melodic function can be discerned: the fanfare in *Fêtes*, the tritone motive in *Sirènes*, the melancholy call in the first movement of *La mer*, a victory call in the second movement of *La mer*, and the recall of the first movement's melancholy call in the third movement of *La mer*. These examples will be presented and discussed below.

In *Fêtes*, the fanfare figure is the most important musical message in the middle section (m.116-173). Starting at measure 116, the low strings' pizzicatos and timpani provide a steady rhythmic support (see example 7.5). The harps not only provide a rhythmic function, but also, with their ringing sonority, create a solemn atmosphere. The background here, in a very soft dynamic, suggests a procession heard in the far distance. At measure 124, a fanfare on three muted trumpets, in a chordal arrangement, joins the

procession (see example 5.14). Their muted sonority, softly emerging from the background, also sounds as though it is approaching from the distance.



Ex. 5.14. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 124-131.

After a transfer to the woodwinds, the trumpets resume the fanfare at measure 156 (see example 8.7). Here the trombones double at an octave below to reinforce the trumpets. As an implication of the approaching procession, the dynamic is increased and the texture of the background becomes more complex and clearly heard. In the third section, at measures 202, 237 and 244, the fanfare figure is restated on the trumpets.

In *Sirènes*, the trumpet is used specifically to play the tritone motif, which is markedly similar to the English horn's motif in *Nuages*. Both share

their similar arching shape and narrow range of intervals (compare example 5.15 to example 4.31). The trumpet's tritone motif first appears at measure 83 of *Sirènes* (example 5.15), where two trumpets, in their lower register, playing in unison, produce a melancholy effect. At measure 111, 113, 117 and 137, the tritone motif, with transposition and slight transformations is restated by a solo trumpet.



Ex. 5.15. Debussy, *Sirènes*, mm. 83-84.

In the first movement of *La mer*, the muted trumpet, doubled by the English horn sounding an octave lower, plays a melancholy call (see example 4-39 and the discussion of the English horn's doubling). At measure 112, this motif is restated by the same combination of instruments and pitched a whole step lower.

In the second movement of *La mer*, the trumpet's victory motif first appears at measure 123 (example 5.16). Here, the first trumpet emerges from a soft dynamic, gradually increasing in power to produce a climax. At measures 136, 145, 181, 185, 193, 197 and 215, fragments of this motif are consistently recalled by the trumpets, mostly submerging under the texture.



Ex. 5.16. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 123-126.

In the third movement of *La mer*, the melancholy call (originally appearing in the first movement) is first restated by the muted first trumpet at measure 31 (example 6.11). Accompanied by the shimmering violins' tremolo, the muted trumpet in its high register, with a taut, incisive tone color, clearly penetrates the texture. At measure 38, two muted trumpets restate this call, again powerfully.

Apart from the fixed melodic usage for the trumpet discussed above, in the third movement of *La mer*, at measure 258, Debussy wrote a chorale passage for the brass, with the trumpets leading the melody (see example 5.12), a very unusual style in Debussy's orchestral works. Here, the bright color of the first and second trumpet in unison dominates the brass choir, with the woodwind and the strings supporting with an ostinato rhythm.

### Harmonic Usage

The trumpet's bright tone color is not easily blended with other instruments. When serving in a harmonic background, the combination of the instruments, dynamic level, and the demands of musical background

need to be considered carefully. Debussy often uses only the trumpets to produce a pure metallic sound as the fanfare in *Fêtes* (see example 5.14).

Another example is at measure 90 of the third movement of *La mer*, where three muted trumpets play a c<sup>#</sup> minor chord, imitating and continuing the horns' rhythmic motif (originally from the previous strings). The trumpets' piercing color in their high register match well with the cymbal's metallic sound. With clear-cut articulation and a *decrescendo*, the trumpets create a splashing sound with something of an echoing effect (see example 5.17).

The musical score for measures 90-91 of Debussy's *La mer III* is presented in four staves. The top staff, labeled 'Corns', and the second staff, labeled '3<sup>e</sup>', both show a rhythmic motif of eighth notes with a decrescendo hairpin. The third staff, labeled '3 Tromp.', shows a sustained c<sup>#</sup> minor chord with a decrescendo hairpin and the instruction 'Sourdines' above it. The bottom staff, labeled 'Cymb.', shows a single cymbal stroke with a decrescendo hairpin.

Ex. 5.17. Debussy, *La mer III*, mm. 90-91.

Sometimes, Debussy incorporates the trumpets in a *tutti* section to dominate the sonority, producing a climax, such as at the high point in the second movement (measure 153-160) and the big ending of the third movement of *La mer*. Sometimes, he groups the trumpets with horns,

trombones, and tuba to produce an integrated brass sonority (see example 5.12).

The trumpet has a slight nasal color, particularly when muted, which reveals a similar tone quality to the oboe and English horn. Debussy sometimes groups the muted trumpet and these double reeds together, highlighting their similar tone color in this usage. As discussed in the oboe's special effects, Debussy uses the oboe and the trumpet in an echoing effect (see example 4.4).

At measures 9 and 11 of the third movement of *La mer*, two muted trumpets combine with two clarinets, playing in thirds, to reinforce the oboes' sonority. The tremolo basses, rolling timpani, and sustained contrabassoon construct a tritone-based harmony; together with the bass drum rolls and the metallic sound of the cymbals and tam-tam, they provide a pale but energized background. Here, the muted trumpets' bright tone color with their nasal sound strongly supports and articulates the oboes (see example 5.18).

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *La mer III*, measures 9-12. The score is written for a large ensemble, including Rth, Cl, C. Bnd, Trump., Sordines, Timb., Gr C., Cy a.b., T-T, and D.B. The Trumpet part is highlighted with a thick line and shows a quick response and effective tonguing technique. The score includes various dynamics such as *sfz*, *p*, *mf*, *pp*, and *ppp*. The Sordines part is marked *mf* and the Timb. part is marked *pp*. The D.B. part is marked *ppp* and includes the instruction "Sur le chevalet".

Ex. 5.18. Debussy, *La mer III*, mm. 9-12.

The trumpet's quick response and effective tonguing technique make it an agile instrument for the rhythmic aspect of performance. Debussy uses this property efficiently to create a harmonic and rhythmic background. At measure 195 of the third movement of *La mer* (see example 6.2), two trumpets playing in thirds, are doubled by the first and second horns at the lower octave. In the big *tutti* passage, their incisive articulation, in mixed duplet and triplet rhythm, construct a strong rhythmic background to the complex texture.

Another example appears at measure 211 in the same movement (example 5.19). Here, three trumpets in a chordal setting playing an urgent triplet ostinato pattern dominate the rhythm. The alternating groups, stopped



horns, and woodwinds (piccolo, oboes and clarinet), are given grace notes to intensify the energetic rhythm. The pizzicato strings add to the leaping character. Combined, these various instruments create a complex texture that vividly suggests an image of the water suddenly spurting out.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *La mer* III, measures 211-214. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Piccolo, Flute, Clarinet, Horn, Trumpet, Drums, and Cymbals. The tempo is marked 'au Mouvt (en serrant peu à peu)'. The score shows a complex texture with various instruments playing grace notes and rhythmic patterns. The bottom section of the score shows the strings playing a pizzicato pattern.

Ex. 5.19. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 211-214.

### Special Effects

The trumpet's bright tone color makes its entrances in an ensemble a special event. Debussy's fixed melodic usages of the trumpet in these works, as discussed above, show his particular treatment of this instrument; the use

of the trumpet to produce an echoing effect, as discussed in the oboe's special effects shows another.

Debussy uses the trumpet very sparingly in *Pelléas*. In Act III, scene 2, two measures after 29, Debussy exerts the trumpet's brassy and strident tone color, alternating with the horns (marked *cuivrez*), to alert us to the dangerous environment in the castle's vault, into which Golaud leads Pelléas. Here, the ostinato of the low strings' *pizzicato* and the timpani create a foreboding effect. The abrupt breaking out of the three trumpets, combined with the English horn, produces a shocking effect to imply unknown dangers in the vault (see example 5.20).

The musical score for Debussy's *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 2, three measures after measure 29, is shown. The score includes staves for C. a., Cl., H. a., Cuiv., Trp., Timb., P., Go., V. a., and C. B. The music features a combination of brass instruments (trumpets and horns) playing a brassy, strident tone, and low strings (pizzicato) and timpani creating a foreboding effect. The score includes dynamic markings such as <sf>, p, pp, and sf. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: "Où, jadis que jadis, se dait la guelfe", "le bras", "Venez vous le guelfe, Pelléas? Pelléas?"

Ex. 5.20. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 2, three mm. after 29.

A signal-like motif with an iambic rhythmic pattern regularly appears in the four works being studied. This motif is presented at various dynamic levels and with the short note of the iambus occurring sometimes above, in other instances below the longer note. The signal first occurs in the third horn's echo figure at measure 5 of the *Prélude* (example 8.3). The tritone calls of the horns in *Nuages* show another character (example 6.6). The trumpet sometimes gives the signal, adding a bright tone color to it. At measure 270 of *Fêtes*, two muted trumpets' playing grace note figures imply the signal (see example 5.21), which is reiterated in the horns in the beginning of *Sirènes*.



Ex. 5.21. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 270-271.

At measure 24 of the first movement of *La mer*, the first trumpet (with mute) and English horn play the signal in unison, presenting a nasal tone color (see example 5.22). In the second movement of *La mer*, from measure 153 to 161, the grace-note pattern of the signal appears again (see example 4-16). Here, the trumpets' bright tone color leads the other winds to create a high point.



Ex. 5.22. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 24.

In the third movement of *La mer*: at measure 51, four horns combine with two trumpets to present a powerful statement of the signal; at measures 137 and 143, the first trumpet solo presents the signal, lightly emerging from the horns' chorale (example 5.3). Close to the ending at measure 284, three trumpets powerfully state the signal then transfer it to the cornet and low brass, leading to a splendid conclusion.

In *Pelléas*, in Act III, scene 2, two measures after 32, the trumpets are used to play the iambic rhythmic signal, which softly emerges from the sea-like atmosphere produced by the harps and tremolo strings. At 34, the signal becomes powerful in the wind *tutti*, with the trumpets' bright tone color again leading the sonority.

### Cornet

The cornet has a slightly rounded and less incisive sound than the trumpet because of its conical bore. Among all the orchestral works completed and orchestrated by Debussy, the cornet is used only in the third

movement of *La mer*. Apart from a few sparing usages, Debussy confines the cornets to two special passages in this movement.

In the first passage, the cornets are used as a signal in unison at their first entrance at measure 121 (example 5.23). The iambic rhythmic signal can be traced back to the beginning of the first movement of *La mer* (also to the *Prélude* as discussed in the special effects of the trumpet).



Ex. 5.23. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 121-122.

After the cornets' powerful signals, the music subsides gradually into alternating instrumental groups (trumpets and bassoons, horns and low strings, trombones and basses). At measure 129, the same signal appears again (with only one cornet), but in a very soft dynamic (see example 5.25). Debussy marks it "*et très lointain*", meaning the signal is heard from afar. The two entrances here and the gradual subsiding of the music strongly show the sense of space that Debussy intends to create in his music. It is worthy of notice that the tam-tam is incorporated in these two signals, adding a broader sonority and reinforcing their character. As the signal returns for the cornets in the big ending (a slight transformation combining

the trombones and the tuba), their powerful appearance transcends the orchestra's sonority, arousing a splendid triumphant effect.

The second usage of the cornet is to replace the trumpet for the cyclic motif. The muted cornet takes the melancholy call at measure 215 (the cyclic motif first appearing in trumpet and English horn doubling in the first movement) in a more urgent declamation with intense articulation, the only motif in this figuration (see example 5.24). A fragment of this motif is restated at measures 273 and from 278 to 282, but this time with a disturbed character. The use of the cornets to replace the trumpets in playing the cyclic motif produces a subtle change of tone color, which is an important technique in Debussy's orchestration.



Ex. 5.24. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 215-218.

### **Trombone and Tuba**

In the works being studied, Debussy uses trombones and tuba only in *Fêtes*, the first and third movements of *La mer*, and *Pelléas*. His usage of the low brass is best understood in the context of his use of the trombone: "Only in the ultimate extremity should a trombone blare" (see the beginning of this

chapter and footnote). In the works in which the low brass are employed, three trombones and tuba are consistently grouped together. They are mainly used as a base of support to the harmony. The trombones are employed mostly in their comfortable middle and low register. Their brilliant high register, roughly above middle *C*, is used occasionally (often in the first trombone), but the high notes are never beyond  $b^{\flat_1}$ . The tuba, pitched mostly between *FF* to *F*, is used to extend the trombone's low register.

In a strong *tutti* passage such as the splendid ending of the first and third movements of *La mer* (example 8.17), the low brass' full, blaring sonority serves to reinforce the power of the *tutti* and strengthen the texture. In both cases, Debussy uses the first and second trombones in a high tessitura, which powerfully adds a bright tone color to the *tutti*.

In the high point of the middle section of *Fêtes* (mm. 170-173, see example 5.5) and the chorale passage in the third movement of *La mer* (mm. 258-265, see example 5.12), the trombones and tuba, in a harmonic supporting role, are combined with the trumpets and the horns to create a brass-dominated sonority. A powerful brass sound is one of the effective usages of the low brass in Debussy's scores.

The main function of the low brass is to serve as the bass of the orchestra, as discussed above. Debussy rarely employs them in solo passages.

One of the rare examples is found at measure 127 of *La mer* (see example 5.25), where three trombones play consecutive chromatic descending augmented triads, in transitional phrases that have been gradually transferred from the trumpets to the horns and to the trombones. Here, the tremolo string basses play an ascending chromatic scale, contrary to the trombones' descending line, and the contrabassoon's sustaining C, combined with the tremolo cellos, timpani, and bass drum, provide a quivering background. The trombones' chromatic lines, linked with the horns, are clearly but softly presented, and gradually subside. At the end of the descending lines, the cornet's signal resounds from the distance. The entire transitional passage, a brass-dominated sound from the trumpets to the trombones, paves the way for the horns' chorale that immediately follows.



C. Bon

Cornets

3 Tromb.

Tuba

Timb.

Gr. C

Cymb.

T.-T.

Vc.

D.B.

*Solo*

*pp et très lointain*

*p e dim. molto*

*pp*

*ppp*

*ppp*

*ppp*

*pp*

*sur la touche*

*sur la touche*

*p e dim. molto*

*ppp*

Ex. 5.25. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 127-132.

The technique of combining the trombones with the trumpets to reinforce the power and broaden the incisive tone color of the trumpets is sometimes found in the scores. Two examples from *Fêtes* show this combination. The first is seen at measure 23 (see example 5.4), where the first and second trombones underline the trumpets, with the third trombone, tuba, bassoons, and basses strongly supporting the Db. Here, the trumpets

and two trombones blend well in their strong articulation and brassy tone color, providing an image of the approach of a well trained military band.

The second example appears at measure 156 of *Fêtes* (example 8.7); the trombones combine with the trumpets to play the powerful fanfare. This is also one of the rare examples of the trombones used melodically by Debussy. Again, the trombones blend well with the trumpets with their articulation and brassy tone color. Here, a bustling background (vigorous ostinato rhythms in the woodwind, horns, percussion and low strings) supports the strong and lucid fanfare of the trumpets and the trombones and the arching melody in the violins and violas. The complex texture and strong musical expression imply that a procession is close by.

In *Pelléas*, Debussy uses the low brass sparingly in the first, second and fourth acts. Harmonic support remains their main function; the most frequent usage of the low brass is in combination with other brass or in a *tutti* section. Very occasionally, the low brass is found dominating the sonority. One of the examples is in Act IV, scene 2, four measures before 23 (see example 5.26), where three trombones' full, dark sonority (with the tuba joining them later) is used to reflect the gloomy emotion of Golaud after he has tortured Mélisande. The low strings' *pizzicato* lightly provides delicate articulation to the low brass's full, sustained sound.



timpani and cymbal are used most often in various combinations of percussion. Table 10 shows the percussion used in the four works (no percussion is used in *Sirènes*). It is worthy of notice that only one percussion instrument is used in the *Prélude* and *Nuages*, while only metallic instruments, cymbals, triangle and bell are used in the second movement of *La mer*. The following study is grouped by the individual instruments and presented by the order in which they are most often used.

Table 10. The Percussion Used in the Four Works.

Work	Instruments
Prélude	antique cymbals
Nuages	timpani
Fêtes	timpani, cymbals, snare drum
La mer I	timpani, cymbals, tam-tam
La mer II	cymbals, triangle, bell
La mer III	timpani, cymbals, tam-tam, bell, bass drum
Pelléas	timpani, cymbals, triangle, bell, cloche

### Timpani

The timpani basically have three main functions in the works being studied: creating an atmosphere, serving as a rhythmic support and reinforcing the sonority. The techniques used include single and double strokes and rolls.

## Creating an Atmosphere

Debussy uses the timpani as an important instrument in creating an atmosphere, which is shown in his exuberant employment of rolls. In *Nuages*, the timpani are the only percussion used and in their two entrances, only rolls are employed. The first entrance, at measure 7 (see example 5.27), is combined with the sustaining clarinets and bassoons and the muted *divisi* violins, to supersede the flutes and horns in providing a harmonic background for the English horn's expressive solo. Three layers are presented in the background: the first violins, in six *divisi* spanning three octaves, thinly but clearly dominate the sonority; the interlocking clarinets and bassoons provide a major-minor seventh chord (without the fifth); and the timpani very gently support a humming bass.



5.28), the tremolo low strings cease and the timpani offer a faint accompaniment to the flute's pentatonic melody (a reminiscence of the previous section), with the echoing tritone of the horns and the delicate touch of the *pizzicato* strings.

The musical score is for Debussy's *Nuages*, measures 97-102. It is marked 'Encore plus lent'. The score includes parts for 1st Flute (SOLO), Cors (Sordines), Timpani, and Strings. The flute plays a pentatonic melody. The timpani provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The strings play a delicate *pizzicato* accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and features a pentatonic melody in the flute.

Ex. 5.28. Debussy, *Nuages*, mm. 97-102.

The same function is found in the beginnings of the first (see example 8.11) and third movements of *La mer*, where the timpani's rolls again softly serve as a background. In the beginning of the third movement, the bass

drum's rolls join the timpani, creating a mixed rumbling sound effect of less definite pitch (see example 5.29).

Animé et tumultueux ( $\text{♩} = 96$ )

3 TIMBALES

GROSSE-CAISSE

CYMBALES

TAM-TAM

ALTOS

VIOLONCELLES

CONTREBASSES

Ex. 5.29. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 1-6.

In *Pelléas*, the timpani's rolls are found combined with the low strings or low winds to produce a full, dark sonority, particularly reflecting the gloomy and mysterious atmosphere of the opera. At the beginning, the low strings combine with the bassoons to present a full, dark sound, which sets the gloomy character of the opera. When the woodwind's melody appears at measure 5, the timpani's rolls are doubled with the second bassoon and the basses to support the background, their dark sonority continuing the murky effect (see example 4.23).

The timpani are used more consistently in Act III, scene 2, *Les souterrains du château*, where the dark, mysterious panorama of the castle's vault is presented so effectively by the low strings, low winds and timpani,



with the double reeds and the muted horns and trumpets offering an integrated layer of gloom. In this Act, from the last four measures of scene 1, the timpani's rolls start to create a menacing effect, also serving as a bridge to the following scene. In the beginning of Scene 2, the timpani's staccato strokes, contrasting to the smooth, somewhat rounded melody, intermittently appear to provide a feeling of warning (see example 5.30).

**Même mouv<sup>t</sup> (lourd et sombre)**

Ex. 5.30. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 2, beginning.

At 27, the timpani's rolls are doubled with the sustained note of the muted fourth horn to support the bassoons in their dark low register, again

providing a vivid image of the subterranean atmosphere (example 4.48). At

[28], the timpani's eighth-note ostinato figure suggests a nervous reaction

when Golaud mentions the smell of death in the vault (see example 5.31).

The timpani's ostinato figures are combined with the *pizzicato* low strings at two measures after [29], together with the sudden piercing sound of the muted trumpets and horns, to suggest a dangerous situation in the vault (example 5.20). After Golaud and Pelléas finish their underground journey and start to leave the vault, the timpani's rolls again provide an enigmatic background.

The musical score for Debussy's *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 2, at measure 28, features the following instruments and parts:

- C. a.** (Corno Alto): *pp*
- Cl.** (Clarinete): *pp*
- R. E.** (Rinornio): *pp*
- Coro.** (Corno): *pp*
- Timb.** (Timpani): *pp*, eighth-note ostinato figure
- Gu.** (Guitarras): *pp*, *pizzicato* figure
- Vcl.** (Violoncello): *pp*
- C. B.** (Corno Bajo): *ppp*

The voice part (Vcl.) includes the lyrics: "Sentez-vous l'odeur de mort qui monte?" and "Allons jusqu'au bout de ce ro..."

Ex. 5.31. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 2, at [28].

One special effect created by the timpani and low strings occurs in Act IV, scene 4, nine measures before 50. Here, the low strings, with grace notes, imitate the sound of the closing gate. The timpani, doubling the lower parts of the cellos and basses, add a rumbling sound effect. The change of the dynamic, the low strings increasing from *pianissimo* to *sforzando*, and the reinforcement of the timpani and the bassoons, all vividly suggest the closing and the slamming of the gate. In the next measure, a faster movement of the closing gate is implied by the tighter rhythm and increasing tempo (see example 5.32).

The musical score for Debussy's *Pelléas* Act IV, scene 4, nine measures before measure 50, consists of five staves. The staves are labeled: Br. (Bassoon), Timb. (Timpani), P. (Piano), Vclle (Violoncelle), and C. B. (Cello/Bass). The music is in 3/4 time. The dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *sf* (sforzando). The lyrics are: "La-Ré", "Que est ce bruit?", "nerrez", and "On ferme les por - tes...". The score shows a dramatic increase in dynamics and a change in rhythm, suggesting the closing and slamming of a gate.

Ex. 5.32. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act IV, scene 4, nine mm. before 50.

### **Rhythmic Support and Reinforcing the Sonority**

Occasionally, the timpani are used for their rhythmic functions in the works being studied. The most obvious examples are found in the middle section of *Fêtes*. At measure 116, the timpani combined with the *pizzicato* basses and the second harp (later, joined by the cellos and the first harp), softly provide a steady rhythmic background for the trumpets' fanfare (see example 7.5). The timpani, with their buoyant and resonant properties, well blended with the bouncing *pizzicato* low strings and the harps' almost percussive role, here suggest a solemn procession that immediately arrests the listener's attention. At measure 156, as the procession approaches, the fanfare and the arching melody are powerfully presented. The timpani play a strong ostinato rhythm with triplet figures, together with the snare drum, to reinforce the rhythm of the *tutti* (see example 8.7).

The timpani are excellent instruments to produce a powerful reinforcement of the ensemble, a usage that is also often found in Debussy's orchestration. At measure 23 of *Fêtes*, after the powerful statement of the brass, the timpani's *fff* roll strongly extends the force of the brass (example 5.4).

At measure 76 of the first movement of *La mer*, the timpani's rolls, with strong accents, are used to reinforce the *tutti*. It is worthy of notice that

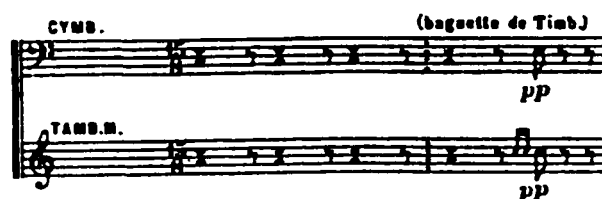
the timpani's D, doubled by the second and third bassoons and the basses, produces a minor second dissonance with the whole ensemble.

From measure 44 of the third movement of *La mer*, the timpani's *crescendi*, occurring every two measures, reinforce the winds' *crescendi* and the strings' ascending scales. At measure 55, the timpani's *fortissimo* accent, followed by the strings' powerful *pizzicato* (G<sup>#</sup>, low in a three octave doubling), strongly close the first section. At the last measure of this movement, the timpani, combined with the strings (D, low in a three octave doubling), powerfully close this work with a dry accent (example 8.17).

In *Pelléas*, the timpani again contribute to the powerful endings of the third and fourth Acts, with similar final punctuation and comparable instrumentation to the third movement of *La mer*. At the end of Act III (see example 5.33), following the crescendos of the bassoons, horns and the timpani, the low strings join and quickly end *secco*. The ending E here is doubled through four octaves. The ending of the fourth Act, with the trombones replacing the horns, is in three octave doublings.



stick is required, except in some passages where the timpani's sticks are asked to produce a more rounded sound effect. Examples can be found in *Fêtes*, at measure 208, where the cymbal and the snare drum are grouped together to articulate the last beat of the active 15/8 rhythm (see example 5.34). The main functions of the cymbals in the works under study can be classified as reinforcing power and producing colorful effects.



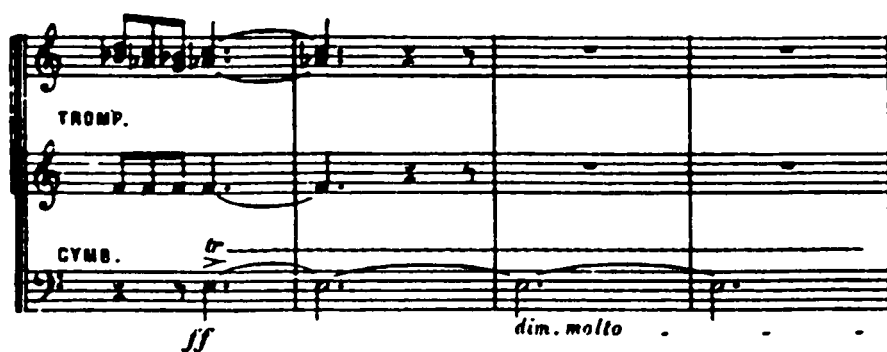
Ex. 5.34. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 208.

### Reinforcing the Power

Debussy often uses the cymbal's rolls to create a precise moment in a high point of a cascading effect. In the coda of the first movement of *La mer*, from measure 132, the cymbal's roll starts from a very soft dynamic (example 6.27); two measures later, it gradually increases in intensity and combines with the timpani's roll and the winds' crescendo to open a wide and strong sonority. After the open sound at measure 135, the cymbal's roll continues to exert its power, pushing forward to a splendid ending. In the third movement of *La mer*, from the last six measures, the cymbal's roll, combining with the tam-tam, powerfully contribute their metallic sonority to

the *tutti*. The cymbal again gradually increases the strength to push the orchestra to a climactic ending (see example 8.17).

The combination of the trumpet's brilliant tone color and the cymbal's metallic sound is effective in evoking a powerful and emotional atmosphere. At measure 204 of *Fêtes*, the cymbal's strong roll connects to the last notes of the trumpets' brassy fanfare, powerfully extending its strength. Two measures later, the cymbal's roll gradually subsides, serving as a bridge to the next section (see example 5.35).



Ex. 5.35. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 204-207.

In the third movement of *La mer*, at measures 96 (example 8.15), 102 and 108, Debussy uses the cymbal's roll to reinforce the horns' iambic motive. The splash sound created by the cymbal's strong rolls also provides an image of a big crash of the waves, as already implied by the strings' wave-like figuration.



At the high point (measures 155 and 159) of the second movement of *La mer*, the crash cymbals strongly join the powerful *tutti*. The crisp metallic attack of the cymbals and their slow decay again reinforce the power at the climax.

### **Colorful Effects**

Not only does Debussy use the cymbal to reinforce a climax, he also utilizes it ingeniously to produce special colorful effects. Among these, using the crash cymbals in a soft dynamic to produce a splash of sound is frequently found in the works being studied. In works associated with the sea, this splash of sound is very adequately correlated to the sound of the crashing wave. At measure 81 of the first movement of *La mer*, after the subsiding of the tremolo strings and timpani (which can be thought as the retreat of the wave), the cymbals' soft crash is distinct, and the resonance of the ring provides an image of the splash of the wave.

At the second measure of the second movement of *La mer* (see example 8.13), the bell's jingling sound and the full resonance of the harp emerge from the wave-like tremolo strings and the woodwind chord. The cymbals' short crash sound matches the jingling atmosphere and again creates a splash sound effect. At measure 62, the cymbals are again grouped

with the bell and the harp to create a ringing sound environment, with the triangle adding its tinkling tone color (example 4.35).

In *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 2, after Pelléas and Golaud start to leave the castle's vault, Debussy uses the flutes' arpeggios, string tremolos, and the harps' sweepings to create a musical background to imply fresh air coming from the forest, flowers, and sea. The cymbals' crash sound again appears to imitate the splash of the sea (two measures after [32](#)).

Apart from increasing the power in a *tutti*, the cymbal's roll is sometimes used combined with tremolo strings, creating a subtle shimmering background effect. Examples can be found in the third movement of *La mer* (at measure 30, see example 6.11) and *Pelléas*, Act II, scene 2 ([35](#) and [36](#)).

Occasionally, the cymbal is used delicately as a solo instrument or clearly sounds out above a very quiet background. At the penultimate measure of *Fêtes*, the cymbals' stroke occurs after the straightforward progression of the timpani and the *pizzicato* low strings to suggest (perhaps fancifully) a V-I cadence (see example 5.36). The sudden appearance of the cymbals' bright tone color creates a flash of color contrasting with the dark low strings and timpani.



(example 4.35), the bell alternates with the harp to produce a tinkling atmosphere. At measure 237, the bell clearly articulates the harp's arpeggios (example 7.10). At measure 258, the bell extends the flute's pentatonic melody, supported by the harmonics of the harp and solo violins (example 4.6).

In *Pelléas*, the bell appears only briefly in Act III, scene 3, from 38 to 40. Here, the bell joins the violins, contributing its jingling sound, to alternate with the piccolo and oboe. The passage is lively, reflecting the joyful feeling as Pelléas comes back to the ground and breathes again the fresh air from the sea, the grass, and the perfume of the flowers. The tinkling tone color of the bell lightens the mood and contributes to the vivid image of the fragrant air (example 8.19).

### Triangle

The triangle has an indefinite pitch, although many different sizes of triangle exist and the selection of an instrument should be based upon the context in which it is to be used. Debussy uses the triangle in the second movement of *La mer* and *Pelléas* (briefly used in Act IV, scene 3). In the second movement of *La mer*, Debussy groups the triangle either with the cymbals or the harps to obtain a tinkling effect. At measures 49 and 53, at the apex of the two harps' alternating arching glissandos, the ring of the

triangle, with grace notes, articulates the harps and accentuates the shape of the figure (example 6.26). This is repeated at measures 226 and 230 without the grace notes. At measures 62 (example 4.35), 104, and 145 the triangle alternates with the cymbals, contributing to their ringing sound. At the high point of this movement, measure 155, after the cymbals' strong crash, the tremolo triangle follows and increases the dynamic to replenish the gradual subsiding of the cymbals.

In *Pelléas*, the triangle appears only in Act IV, scene 3. From seven measures before 28, the triangle's ring clearly penetrates through the alternated ostinato figures of the clarinets and bassoons and the delicate shimmering background created by the sustained low strings and tremolo violins and violas. The music represents Yniold watching the crowd of the sheep huddling together in the dark. Here the tinkling triangle provides an image of the light of the distant star or possibly implies the bell sounding on the sheep's neck (see example 5.37).

Ex. 5.37. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 3, six mm. before 28.

### Tam-tam

The tam-tam, also an instrument of unspecified pitch, is employed in the first and third movements of *La mer*. Debussy uses the tam-tam to underpin the orchestral sonority at climaxes, and employs its Oriental flavor to produce a somewhat exotic effect in *La mer*. At the endings of the two movements, and measure 121 of the third movement, the tam-tam's wide vibration creates a huge resonance to reinforce the *tutti* (see example 8.17 for the ending of the third movement of *La mer*).

Almost all the entrances of the tam-tam in the two movements of *La mer* are accompanied by the timpani, including the above examples. In the beginning of the third movement (see example 5.29), the timpani and bass

drum's rolls pave a rumbling background. At measures 3 and 5, the low strings' full and dark sound is well blended with the tam-tam; the tam-tam also effectively opens and extends the range of the sonority.

### **Bass Drum**

The bass drum is only used in the third movement of *La mer*. In the beginning, the bass drum's roll is combined with the timpani's roll to create a mixed rumbling effect, serving as a tremulous background (see example 5.29). At measures 36 and 121, similar usages of the combination of the two instruments' rolls are used. The bass drum occasionally provides a rhythmic function, as is seen at measures 72 (grouped with the *pizzicato* strings) and 245 (grouped with the timpani).

### **Snare Drum**

The snare drum is used only in *Fêtes*. From measure 154 to 173, the snare drum steadily serves a rhythmic function. Its marching cliché is reflected in its dry sonority and its ostinato figure. Here, combined with two melodic elements, the brass' fanfare and strings' arching melody, and the cross rhythm of the triplet and duplet, the snare drum's dotted rhythm is incisively penetrating and adds a clear line to the complex texture (see example 8.7). From measure 208 to 219, the snare drum, in a drag figure, is

grouped intermittently with the cymbal, alternating with the timpani, to articulate the arching melody.

At measures 233 and 235 (example 4.54), the snare drum combines with the *pizzicato* violas, to reinforce the bassoon's grace-note figure and also articulate the triplets of the low strings. At measure 266, the snare drum reinforces the low strings' triplets (example 6.18).

### **Antique Cymbal**

Antique cymbals are played in pairs and have specific pitches. They are small, so that the player holds one in each hand and strikes one against the other at their rims. Since the method of performance limits the number of notes and the complexity of parts, contemporary composers uses the crotales, played singly with a beater, to produce a similar tone color but with more agility. Two pairs of antique cymbals, E and B, are used in the *Prélude*, from measure 94 to the end of this work. At measure 94, the crystalline tone of the instrument penetrates through the delicate tremolo strings and provides a ring to the background (see example 7.3). At the last three measures, after the music gradually subsides, the antique cymbals' tone provides a vivid image of the light of a distant star (see example 8.5). The sound effect is probably intended by Debussy to reflect the light of the star in the



penultimate line of Mallarmé poem, "*Ouvrir ma bouche à l'astre efficace des vins!*" (Must yawn at yonder star that keeps vines growing!)<sup>43</sup>

### ***Cloches* (Chimes)**

The *cloches* are used close to the end of *Pelléas* to create a literal effect; only one note, G<sub>2</sub> is employed, which suggests the tolling of a funeral bell, as the servants fall to their knees (example 5.38). The timpani's soft roll and the tremolo cellos create a shaky background while the *pizzicato* basses provide light articulation, and the first harp's rolling sound in its low register produces a dark, full resonance. At the second measure, the solemn effect of the *cloche*'s soft strokes evokes a funeral bell. Four measures from the end (see example 4.7), the *cloche*'s sound is dissolved into the harp's arpeggios, softly fading away to the last chord.

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<sup>43</sup> William Austin, "Toward an Analytical Appreciation," *Prelude to "the Afternoon of a Faun": An Authoritative Score*, ed. William Austin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1970), 29.

36

Hrb.

1<sup>re</sup> H.

Timb.

A.

V<sup>ce</sup>

Alt.

V<sup>cl</sup>

C. H.

En ce moment toutes les servantes  
tombent subitement à genoux au  
fond de la chambre

se retournant  
Qu'y a-t-il?

tous div.

pizz

arco

pizz

tous div. *nnnni pp que possible*

pizz. *nnnni pp que possible*

Ex. 5.38. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act V, 36.

## CHAPTER VI

### WRITING FOR STRINGS AND HARP

#### Strings

Debussy's orchestration creates a wide range of moods, colors, textures and dynamics, all achieved with extraordinary subtlety and originality. His ingenuity is particularly evident in his writing for strings. Unlike the traditional string-based orchestration, which relies mainly on the strings to produce a full and exuberant sonority, Debussy uses the strings subtly both melodically and harmonically to create a delicate and colorful element in his music, reserving a full sonority for climaxes and special moments only.

Debussy utilizes various special techniques of the strings in the four works being studied, such as tremolo (fingered and bowed), *pizzicato*, harmonics, mute, *sur la touche*, *sur le chevalet*, and multiple *divisi*. The usage of the solo strings to produce distinct color in the orchestra is also an important feature in Debussy's orchestration. None of these techniques are employed in a radically new manner (most can be found in Wagner's operas),

but Debussy's refined ear and willingness to often assign the strings to a secondary role is perhaps the defining feature of his orchestration. Debussy influenced the orchestral style of many subsequent composers, including Ravel, Stravinsky, Bartok, Szymanowski, Vaughan Williams and Messiaen. His tendency to favor winds seems to be a French preference, as seen in many of Debussy's forbears, including Rameau, Gluck, Berlioz and Bizet.

In this chapter, the strings are studied as an integral section. Their melodic usages, harmonic functions and special effects will be explored.

### **Melodic Usage**

The strings' melodic usage discussed in this section is focused on the strings as a group as it dominates the melodic contour. Debussy's ingenious employments of the solo strings to create a distinct color in the orchestra will be discussed in the section on special effects.

As in the Classic and Romantic periods, the strings, with their wide range of register, exuberant expression of sound quality, are found dominating most of the melodies in orchestral works. In Debussy's orchestration, the strings are mainly used to create atmospheres and imaginative accompaniments and so their melodic function is not as preponderant as in the traditional string-based orchestral works. When the strings are given a melody, Debussy's treatment is original. In the middle

section of the *Prélude*, the strings in octave doubling (violins combined on the higher octave, violas and cellos on the lower, see example 7.2) dominate the lyrical melody, with the basses, winds, and harps supporting the background. This passage, apart from some transitional phrases, is the longest continuous melody given to the strings in that work. Debussy not only creates a contrasting tone color to the previous woodwind-dominated melody, he also effectively uses this romantic cliché of the strings playing the lyrical melody to represent the Faun's passion as implied in Mallarmé's poem.

The strings' single-octave doubling, when used melodically, has a flexibility of sound that can be shaped and phrased better than doublings of more than two octaves. A similar doubling of the violins on the higher octave and the violas and cellos on the lower octave, as in example 7.2, occurs at measure 102 of *Fêtes*. Here, again, the strings in octave doubling play the melody, with the basses and winds supported harmonically and rhythmically.

Sometimes, the violins are used alone in octave doubling to play the melody, which has a purer sonority than the doubling that includes the low strings. At measure 40 of the *Prélude*, the first and second violins, doubled at the octave, play the transitional phrase. In the second movement of *La mer*,

at measure 36, the first and second violins double at the octave to lead the melody (example 6.1). Here, the violins' trills and the arching shape of the melody vividly suggest the undulation of the wave.



Ex. 6.1. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 36-39.

The violin's high register has a penetrating and intense sonority. Composers often use this tension to produce a climax or to express an eruption of passion. In the third movement of *La mer*, at measure 195, the first violins climb to their extreme high register, with the second violins and violas doubling at the lower octave. Together this achieves a brilliant high point, reiterating the sea motif. The piccolo doubles the first violin, contributing to its piercing tone color, and the English horn and two horns, doubled at two octaves lower, reinforce the power of the melody. This passage is the climax of the principal theme. It is worthy of notice that among the many repetitions of the sea motif in the third movement, this is

the only passage Debussy uses the strings to dominate the melody, which evokes an impressive effect, particularly at the high point (see example 6.2).

The image displays a page of a musical score for Debussy's *La mer III*, measures 195-198. The score is written for a large ensemble, including vocal soloists and a full orchestra. The tempo is marked *a Tempo* at the beginning of the passage. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Soprano (Sopr.), Alto (Alto), Tenor (Tenor), Bass (Bass), Clarinet (Cl.), First and Second Trombones (1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Tromb.), Trumpets (1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Tromp.), Horns (Cor A.), and Harp (Harpe). The second system includes parts for Violins (Viol.), Violas (Vcl.), Cellos (Cello), and Double Basses (Contreb.). The music features a complex texture with many overlapping melodic lines. Dynamics include *f* (forte), *fz* (forzando), *fz très expressif*, and *fz p*. The tempo is marked *a Tempo* at the beginning of the passage. The score is written for a large ensemble, including vocal soloists and a full orchestra. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Soprano (Sopr.), Alto (Alto), Tenor (Tenor), Bass (Bass), Clarinet (Cl.), First and Second Trombones (1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Tromb.), Trumpets (1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Tromp.), Horns (Cor A.), and Harp (Harpe). The second system includes parts for Violins (Viol.), Violas (Vcl.), Cellos (Cello), and Double Basses (Contreb.). The music features a complex texture with many overlapping melodic lines. Dynamics include *f* (forte), *fz* (forzando), *fz très expressif*, and *fz p*.

Ex. 6.2. Debussy, *La mer III*, mm. 195-198.

In *Pelléas*, the violin's high register is also often used to create tension at a climax. One example is found in the interlude between Act IV, scene 2 and scene 3. At 8 measures after 24, the high point of this passage, the violins' unison in their very high register dominates the melody and is reinforced by the three-octave doubling of the winds, with additional strength from the trumpets. The tension produced by the high violins portrays the agony of Mélisande after she was deeply hurt by Golaud. Here, Debussy creates a contrasting sonority by alternating the violins' high register with the register two octaves below (see example 8.21).

Debussy's preference for the cello's warm, magnetic sound is shown in his employment of it in solo roles (this will be discussed later in the special effects), as a group, and in different combinations with other instruments. In *Fêtes*, at measure 15, the cellos are doubled by the bassoons at the same pitch to play the arching melody, well-blended due to the similar tone color in their middle register (see example 4.53). At measure 106 of the second movement of *La mer*, the cellos in unison play the melody, which is a reprise of the English horn's melody at measure 62. Here, the cellos in their high tessitura (soloistic A string) produce a somewhat nasal sound effect, vividly and expressively endowing a penetrating and distinct color to the melody. A similar melodic usage of the cellos' high tessitura occurs at



measure 72 of the third movement of *La mer*, where the first part of the divided cellos is doubled by the flutes at an octave higher. The cellos' distinct sound dominates the sonority and the flutes contribute a bright tone color to the melody (see example 6.3).

The musical score for Example 6.3 shows four staves: Flute (top), Cello (second), Flute (third), and Cello (bottom). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in a single line across the staves, with the Flute and Cello parts playing the same notes. The Flute part is marked with 'p' and 'doux et expressif'. The Cello part is marked with 'p' and 'doux et expressif'. The score includes dynamic markings (p) and phrasing slurs.

Ex. 6.3. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 72-79.

In the first movement of *La mer*, at measure 84, following the subsiding of the first principle section, eight cellos in four parts *divisi* take the melody harmoniously. The complete four-part chord (in close structure) of the cellos, with the highest part dominating the melody, produces a full, strong cello sonority, which also very vividly and freshly serves to open the second principle section. Here, effective orchestration and various dynamic contours accompany the cello line: the bass' *pizzicati* and the timpani's rolls, doubling at the octave, strongly articulate the apex of the cellos' melody (the

quick decay of the bass' *pizzicati* and the *sforzando* and *subito piano* of the timpani's rolls blend with the cellos and also drastically change the dynamics); four horns, in the same chordal setting as the cellos, with strong attack join the sonority and also quickly fit into the soft dynamic level; the timpani, after the *subito piano*, *crescendo* to extend the subsidence of the sonority, producing a swell of sound, which is imitated by the horns in a faster motion to create a second undulation. The subtle change of the dynamics, combining with the use of the instruments here, shows Debussy's ingenious orchestral approach. Two measures later, double the numbers of the cellos are demanded. Such an unusually large number of cellos, even in a modern orchestra, are not always available (see example 6.4).

Un peu plus mouvementé (69 =  $\frac{1}{4}$ )      Très rythmé (104 =  $\frac{1}{4}$ )

Corno  
sans sourdine) *sf* *pp*

Timb.  
*sf* *pp* *p*

Violoncello  
1. 2. V *p* *sf* *p* 1. 2. 3. 4  
3. 4. V *p* *sf* *p* 5. 6. 7. 8 *mf* *f*

Violone  
5. 6. V *p* *sf* *p* 9. 10. 11. 12 *mf* *f*

Contrabasso  
7. 8. V *p* *sf* *p* 13. 14. 15. 16 *mf* *f*  
*pizz.* *arco*

Ex. 6.4. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 84-86.

At the beginning of *Pelléas*, the two-part divided cellos open the opera with a deep, dark sound, which sets the ominous character of the work. Here, harmonic support is also provided by the dark sonority of the bassoons and basses, which blend well with the cellos and creates a gloomy effect (see example 6.5).



The musical score for Debussy's *Nuages*, measures 22-26, is presented in a multi-staff format. The woodwind section, including Cor Anglais, Cors, Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets, and Bassoons, features melodic lines with various dynamics such as *p*, *pp*, and accents. The string section, consisting of Violins, Violas, Cellos, and Basses, plays a continuous triplet figure. The harp part includes a chromatic descending melody. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one flat.

Ex. 6.6. Debussy, *Nuages*, mm. 22-26.

At measure 232 of *Fêtes*, the cellos and basses, again doubled at the octave, continue the running triplet figure and play a chromatic descending melody, which functions as a bridge (refer to example 4.54). The sudden fall

of the pitch band to the low strings and the rapid subtraction of the texture to a simple melodic line creates a strong contrast of tone color as well as texture. At measures 240, 248, and 266 (refer to example 6.18) the descending chromatic melody is reprised.

An effective melodic usage of the low strings occurs in the third movement of *La mer*, from measure 104 to 113, where the bassoons play the wind motif, doubled by the cellos and the basses, the horns and contrabassoon joining at measure 110 (see example 4.55). The low strings' dark sonority blends well with the bassoons' rough tone color; the basses also extend the range of the melody to a lower octave.

Debussy only rarely uses the viola section to lead the melodic contour. One example is found at measure 221 of the third movement of *La mer*, where the violas in unison recall the cellos' motif (at measure 72). The violas, on their D strings, clearly lead the melody. An effective solo example in *Nuages* will be discussed later in the special effect section.

### **Harmonic Usage**

Use of the strings to create an atmosphere or to provide harmonic support is a very important function in Debussy's orchestration. Sometimes, he uses the strings to simply play long sustained chords. Strings have the advantage of being able to sustain indefinitely, not having the breathing

concerns of winds; also they can produce the softest dynamic in the orchestra. In addition, in order to create a delicate, unobtrusive harmonic background, Debussy usually mutes the strings in playing sustained chords.

In the *Prélude*, for example, at measure 79, with the exception of the first violins, the strings, muted, are softly supporting the melody with an E major chord (with an added sixth and ninth later on). Here, the strings' soft chord, combined with the harp's gentle arpeggios, lightly paves a lithe and smooth foundation for the solo flute.

In *Nuages*, at measure 7 (see example 5.27), the violins, muted and divided into six parts, softly play sustained thirds (B and G spanning three octaves), combining the sustained clarinets and the bassoons and the timpani's roll to link to the English horn's tritone-based melody. Here, the first violins in their very high register provide a thin but penetrating sonority, a very distinct color.

At measure 64 of *Nuages* (see example 6.23), the strings, muted and with multiple divisions, play a D<sup>#</sup> minor chord, spanning over five octaves, to support the pentatonic melody of the flute and harp doublings. The divided strings here create a soft but exuberant texture. In *Sirènes*, from measure 139 to the end, a similar treatment of the muted strings again provides a subtle background.

Occasionally, a chordal arrangement of strings is used with a rhythmic function. At measure 55 of the *Prélude*, the violins and violas (divided), in a close structured chordal setting play a syncopated rhythm to energize the lyrical melody of the woodwinds (see example 8.4).

At measure 47 of the first movement of *La mer* (see example 6.7), the strings, with the exception of the basses, are divided into sixteen parts, again in a chordal setting, combined with the harp to give rhythmic support to the solo flute's sinuous melodic line (the English horn and the second flute joining the melody later). This is a good example of Debussy's employment of the strings to produce a complex texture. Here, the first violins' and the cellos' *pizzicato* produce a percussive effect, which blend with the harp's tight rhythm and the slurred staccato of the second violins and violas.



Ex. 6.7. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 47-50.

Debussy often uses the low strings to serve as the base of the orchestra. Their dark and full sonority provides good support to the higher parts. At the beginning of *Sirènes*, the basses play in fifths, combined with the harps and the cellos' wave-like figure, to support the horn calls and the

clarinet's arpeggios. Here, a vivid image is also suggested; the low strings and the harps imply the deep current of the sea. While the clarinet's arpeggios imply the wave on the surface, and the horn calls suggest the sirens' sound from the distance (see example 8.8).

At the beginning of the first movement of *La mer*, the timpani's rolls softly open the movement, together with the sustained basses doubled at the octave. The dark sonority creates a mysterious atmosphere at the onset of the work (see example 8.11). Close to the end of the second movement of *La mer* (at measure 251), the cellos and basses very softly support the harp's pentatonic melody with a sustained fifth. When the first violins (six violins divided in two parts) join the basses at measure 258, their high register is distinctive from the low basses, and the higher violin's harmonics provide a whistling effect to the background (see example 4.6).

To create a vibrant atmosphere, Debussy frequently employs the tremolo effect in the strings. He also uses the strings in various figurations to produce wave-like effects. All of these will be discussed in the following section.

### **Special Effects**

Debussy uses the strings imaginatively and sparingly in comparison to much of the orchestral writing of the nineteenth century. Although there are

rare instances in Debussy's orchestral works when strings are absent from the texture, they are frequently employed subtly as supporting secondary instruments. In order to obtain some special effects, particular usages or techniques of the strings are called for. In this section, the string's solo usage, tremolo, *pizzicato*, harmonics, mute, *sur la touche*, *sur le chevalet*, multiple *divisi*, percussive usage and characteristic figuration will be discussed. In some cases Debussy combines the techniques to make a mixed effect. This is also included in the discussion.

**1. Solo Usage.** Solo instruments are used to produce an individual tone color in an orchestra in order to create a fresh and distinct sonority. Particularly, when a string solo is employed, it always makes a contrasting color to the rest of the string section. In the works being considered, Debussy utilizes the strings in solo, duet, doubling and in combination with other instruments to obtain a wide variety of tone color.

At measure 75 of the *Prélude* (see example 6.8), a solo violin softly recalls the lyrical melody that represents the Faun's passion, and which was originally presented by octave-doubling woodwinds at measure 55 (see example 8.3) and transferred to the strings doubled in octaves at measure 63 (see example 7.2). The solo violin, mostly in a high register, contrasts to the previous complex *tutti*, producing a sweet sound, an expressive reminiscence



clearly transcends the tremolo violins and violas. The oboe effectively echoes fragments of the violin melody.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *La mer II*, measures 82-85. The score is written for five staves: Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in A (Clar. A.), Violin Solo (Vn. Solo), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Double Bass (Cb./Db.). The Oboe and Clarinet in A parts are marked '1st lighter' and 'p'. The Violin Solo part is marked 'pp'. The Viola and Cello/Double Bass parts are marked 'pp'.

Ex. 6.9. Debussy, *La mer II*, mm. 82-85.

A telling viola solo occurs at measure 57 of *Nuages*, where two oboes play the ostinato figure to accompany the chromatic melody of the solo viola. The viola expressively plays on its A string, producing a somewhat nasal tone color that has its affinity with the oboes' sound. Because of the different character of the two musical lines, the oboes and the viola each retain their individual sound and the effect is distinctive (see example 4.29).

The solo cello is heard at measure 100 of the *Prélude*, where it doubles the solo flute at an octave below (see example 4.13). The cello blends with the flute and adds body to its sound. At measure 122 of the first

movement of *La mer*, two cellos double the English horn to play a lyrical melody, with the strings providing a quiet harmonic background. Two cellos in a high register, mostly on their soloist A strings, produce a pinched sound, which blends well with the English horn's nasal tone color (see example 4.38).

At measure 71 of *Nuages* (see example 6.10), three solo strings (violin, viola and cello, each an octave apart) play a lyrical melody, a modification of the pentatonic melody of the harp and flute at measure 64 (see example 6.23). Here, the violin at the highest octave dominates the sonority, the viola and the cello adding weight to the texture.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *Nuages*, measures 71-73. The score is for a string quartet (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello) and includes a piano (p) and a very soft (pp) dynamic. The tempo is marked 'très expressif et très soutenu'. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score shows a complex texture with rapid sixteenth-note passages in the upper staves and sustained, tremolo-like figures in the lower staves.

Ex. 6.10. Debussy, *Nuages*, mm. 71-73.

**2. Tremolo.** Debussy frequently uses both fingered and bowed tremolos in his orchestral works to create various effects in support of the musical milieu. The fingered tremolo produces a rustling effect, which can serve as a delicate, energized background to accompany a melody. At measure 94 of the *Prélude* (see example 7.3), the violins and violas, muted and divided, play fingered tremolos over the fingerboard to create a rustling

background with a vague sonority to accompany the two flutes' unison melody. The muted cellos add a shimmering effect with their bowed tremolos. At measure 5 of *Sirènes*, the violins play fingered tremolos at a high pitch band to add a sparkling effect to the musical background.

Debussy also uses measured fingered tremolo to produce an undulating effect, which serves as a wave-like background. For example, in the first movement of *La mer*, at measure 33, the second violins' and the violas' ostinato figure strongly sets up a wave-like background (see example 8.12).

Bowed tremolo is another effective string technique that can be employed over a wide range of dynamics. When used strongly, it can produce a feeling of excitement; in a soft dynamic, it creates a shimmering effect. At measure 11 of the *Prélude*, the second violins, violas, and cellos very softly play tremolos, combined with the sustained clarinets and two basses to support the solo flute. Here, the tremolo strings play close to the fingerboard to produce a vague sonority, avoiding a too focused sound. Starting from measure 30 of the third movement of *La mer*, the violins, divided into six parts, play a bowed tremolo with a *subito piano*, again close to the fingerboard, combining with the rolling cymbal to provide a flickering effect for the solo trumpet's cyclic motif (see example 6.11).



1<sup>er</sup> Solo avec Sourdine

The musical score for measures 30-35 of Debussy's *La mer* III features several instruments. The Trompe part is marked '1<sup>er</sup> Solo avec Sourdine' and 'f expressif'. The Gr. C., Cymb., and T. T. parts are marked 'pp'. The Div. eu 3. (Sur la touche) parts are marked 'sf > p pp'.

Ex. 6.11. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 30-35.

Similar employment of the tremolo strings playing close to the fingerboard creates a soft shimmering effect. This occurs often in the four works being studied, such as at measure 82 of *Nuages*, at measure 14 of *Sirènes* (see example 8.9), at measure 159 of the third movement of *La mer* (see example 8.16).

Debussy also often uses a strong bowed tremolo to create energy. At measure 76 of the first movement of *La mer* (the high point of the first principal section), the strings' bowed tremolos add a forceful trembling effect to the *tutti*. When combined with a *crescendo*, the strings' tremolo provides agile forward motion. Starting from measure 43 of the third movement of *La mer*, the low strings (the second violins joining

intermittently) create growing excitement by combining their measured bowed tremolos and change of dynamics, from *piano* to *crescendo* in each measure. The increasing agitation finally leads to a *fortissimo* conclusion of the first section. Debussy indicates that the strings should play close to the bridge to produce a more focused and somewhat edgy sound to stimulate the music's atmosphere.

**3. *Pizzicato*.** The strings' *pizzicato* has a distinctive rebounding character, with a clear attack, providing a consonant articulation to any passage. In his orchestral works, Debussy often employs this technique not only to articulate, but also to enrich the musical milieu. In the *Prélude*, a dramatic change occurs at measure 31. Here, for the first time, the solo melody is transferred to the clarinet. The harp's leaping octave notes and the cellos' trembling figure create an agitated atmosphere around the solo clarinet. At the next measure, following the leaping harp, the strings' strong *pizzicatos* give a surprise effect (see example 7.1).

Debussy seems to like to use the definite sound character of the strings' *pizzicatos* to conclude a piece or to close a section. At the endings of the *Prélude* (see example 8.5), *Nuages*, *Fêtes*, and the first two Acts of the opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the strings' *pizzicati* (mostly the low strings) are employed. And, very similarly, all of the endings listed above are in a soft

dynamic level. The strings' *pizzicati* provide a very delicate touch to the endings of those works.

At measure 55 (the conclusion of the first section) of the third movement of *La mer*, following the strong, dry stroke of the timpani, the strings' *pizzicati* powerfully close the first section. Here, the strings play G<sup>#</sup>, doubling in three octaves, to produce a full and dark sonority. Their strong attack and rebounding, blending with the timpani, create a percussive effect.

Debussy also frequently employs the percussive character of the strings' *pizzicati* in their rhythmic function, such as in the middle section of *Fêtes* (see example 7.5). The *pizzicato* strings are combined with the timpani and the harps to set a delicate rhythmic background for the three trumpets' fanfare. At measure 28 of the same work, the divided upper strings playing *pizzicato* in a chordal setting also have a rhythmic function. With their upbeats in a duplet rhythm, the strings add a cross-rhythm effect to the woodwinds' triplet figures.

Debussy often combines various figurations of the strings to create a complex texture to enrich the musical atmosphere. At measure 43 of *Nuages*, measure 26 of *Sirènes* (see example 6.21) and measure 47 of the first movement of *La mer* (see example 6.7), the strings' various lines provide exuberant backgrounds. The employment of the *pizzicato* in those passages

has more than a rhythmic function; it also contributes layers to the complex textures.

Generally speaking, a *pizzicato* on a higher string or higher position has less resonance and quicker decay than the lower string and lower position. A complex chordal arrangement of *pizzicati* generates more overtones to produce a compound sonority, while a simpler chord or single-note *pizzicati* creates a purer tone color; open strings have the greatest resonance. Debussy regularly employs these different colors of the *pizzicati* in his orchestral works. At measure 72 of the second movement of *La mer*, an F triad with multiple doublings played by all the strings is followed by a simpler two notes (C and D) in octave doubling with the absence of the basses (see example 6.12). Here, the first *pizzicati* have a more complex structure and produce a compound tone color, while the second *pizzicati* have a purer sound. The different timbres of the two *pizzicati* provide a contrasting color in the background, which, with a rhythmic function, vaguely suggesting the sonority of the bass drum and side drum. Two measures later, with only the violas and the cellos playing the *pizzicati* (in a major second interval), the tone color is even purer and more penetrating.

**Cédez**

VI. *pizz. ffz*

Vla. *pizz. ffz*

Vc. *pizz. ffz*

D.B. *pizz.*

Ex. 6.12. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 72-73.

At measure 130 of the same movement, the violins play a strong *pizzicato* on their open D strings, doubling the accents played by the stopped horns. The violins and the horns blend well, both strongly articulated, and the violins' open string *pizzicato* contributes abundant resonance to the sonority (see example 5.6).

When the *pizzicato* strings are combined with other instruments to play a melody, their rebounding character is an important factor in that combination. An example can be found at measure 98 of the third movement of *La mer* (see example 4.45), where the *pizzicato* cellos double the bassoons to play the wind motif (seven measures later, the basses join at a lower octave).

In *Pelléas*, Debussy uses the strings' *pizzicati* effectively to match the colloquial, speech-like style of the vocal parts. As Wenk observed, "A loud *pizzicato* does recur as a device of musical punctuation, serving as a kind of exclamation point to emphasize words or events."<sup>44</sup> In Act II, scene 2, four measures after [33], after Golaud has realized the loss of the wedding ring that he had given to *Mélisande*, he agitatedly asks her to search for it (see example 6.13). Golaud's commanding words and his anxious manner are accompanied by the horns' short chords combined with string *pizzicatos*, with an increasing speed and stronger dynamics. Here, again, the *pizzicato* strings blend well with the horns' strong articulation. In Act III, scene 3, five measures after [34], the *pizzicato* strings in a chordal setting strongly punctuate the last word of Pelléas' first sentence after he emerges from the castle vault.

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<sup>44</sup> Arthur Wenk, *Claude Debussy and Twentieth-Century Music*, 44.

**Animé**

**Animé**

1<sup>re</sup> 2<sup>e</sup>

Corn

Viol.

Viol.

Viol.

C. H.

1. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

2. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

3. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

4. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

5. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

6. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

7. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

8. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

9. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

10. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

11. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

12. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

13. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

14. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

15. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

16. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

17. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

18. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

19. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

20. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

21. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

22. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

23. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

24. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

25. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

26. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

27. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

28. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

29. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

30. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

31. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

32. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

33. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

34. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

35. J. vas-y a - vec n'im - por - te qui. Mais il faut y al - ler tout de sui - te, entends-tu?

Ex. 6.13. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act II, scene 2, four mm. after 33.

A special *pizzicato* effect occurs in Act II, scene 2, when Golaud recalls his unknown encounter in the forest. Seven measures after 17, the violins, playing a *pizzicato b* on the G string, strongly punctuate the crescendos of the low strings, bassoons and clarinets. Debussy indicates *arraché* (“harshly tearing-apart”) on the *pizzicato* violins, which vividly provides a sound effect of his frightened horse blindly running into a tree (see example 6.14).

Cl.

B. cor.

Cors.

Go.

ment, et court comme un a - veu - gle fou contre un ar - bre

V. g.

Alt.

V. ll.

C. H.

pizz arraché

arraché

pizz arraché

arraché

pizz

arco

pizz

Ex. 6.14. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act II, scene 2, five mm. after 17

**4. Harmonics.** Natural harmonics on a string instrument are played without vibrato and produce a clear, pure tone (artificial harmonics may be played with vibrato). When articulated, they can sound like a bell, when sustained, similar to the tone of a flute. Debussy usually employs the strings' harmonics sparingly to produce a penetrating background tone color.

In *Nuages*, at measure 86, the iambic motif of horns combined with oboe punctuates the last note of the English horns' tritone-based melody. The



first violins, in *divisi*, play natural harmonics ( $e^3$  and  $b^2$ ), combining with the clarinets and tremolo low strings to provide an E major chord as a harmonic background. Here, the violins' harmonics, two octaves above the low strings, give distinct penetrating layers to the E major triad, contrasting to the quivering effects of the tremolo low strings (see example 6.15).

[illegible]

Ex. 6.15. Debussy, *Nuages*, mm. 85-87.

At measure 157 of the second movement of *La mer*, the first violins (only one player per stand) play harmonics, combined with the four basses and the fourth horn to prepare a steady harmonic background for the flute and oboe's sea motif, which begins two measures later. The harps' arpeggios and the tremolo cellos create an undulating effect. Here, the violins' artificial harmonics ( $a^b$ ), in an extreme high register, produce a flute-like sound clearly emanating from the ensemble (see example 8.16).

An effective use of violins' harmonics occurs in *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 4, at 43. The first violins and the second violins double at the octave to play artificial harmonics, combined with the other strings and the second horn, providing a soft background that delicately supports Pelléas' soliloquy. Here, the pale, white tone color of the violins' harmonics vividly suggests the cool touch of the ice mentioned in Pelléas' text. See example 6.16.

The image shows a musical score for Act IV, scene 4 of Debussy's *Pelléas*, at measure 43. The score is for a full orchestra and includes vocal parts. The tempo is marked "Plus lent" and the dynamics are "p" and "pp". The lyrics are: "Je ne suis presque pas entré du... On a bri-sé la glace a-vec des fers rougis!... Tu dis ce-la d'un air qui vient du bout du en retraçant". The score shows staves for Cors, P, V1, V2, Alt, and Vcl. The V1 and V2 staves are marked "4 Violins soli".

Ex. 6.16. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act IV, scene 4, at 43.

**5. Percussive Usage.** The strings used in a percussive way is also very effective in Debussy' orchestration; high strings can produce a bright, piercing sound, playing *spiccato* or *collé*, while low strings create a deep, drum-like effect. *Pizzicato* strings, as discussed above, have a percussive effect and are employed exuberantly in Debussy's orchestral works. Bowed strings can also successfully produce percussive effects. At the beginning of *Fêtes* (see example 6.17), the violins play a triplet ostinato figure strongly and briskly that opens the movement and continues to serve as a rhythmic underpinning to the arching melody of the doubling English horn and clarinets. The violins in a high register produce a piercing tone color. At measure 9, the low strings supercede the triplet figure to serve as the rhythmic base to the doubling flutes and oboes two measures later. The low strings' dark, deep sound provides a drum-like effect, contrasting to the violins' piercing tone color.

Animé et très rythmé

1<sup>re</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> FLÛTES  
3<sup>e</sup> FLÛTE  
1 COR ANGLAIS  
2 CLARINETTES SI<sup>b</sup>  
VIOLONS  
VIOLONCELLES

Ex. 6.17. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 1-3.

At measure 266 of *Fêtes* (see example 6.18), the cellos and basses double at the octave to play a descending chromatic line in a triplet figure; the snare drum with a mixed rhythm adds its dry sonority to reinforce the percussive effect. This passage is close to the end of this movement.

Debussy specifies *du bout de l'archet* (end of the bow) to ask for a light sonority. He also indicates that the effect moves continually into the distance, implying the gradual disappearance of the departing procession (*pp et toujours en s' éloignant darantage*). Here, Debussy uses the low strings' dark tone color to create a sense of distance with their percussive strokes.

TAMBOUR.

*f*

*a tempo*

Vc. *p* et toujours en s'éloignant davantage

du bout de l'archet

D.B.

du bout de l'archet

*p* et toujours en s'éloignant davantage

Ex. 6.18. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 266-268.

At measures 31 and 34 of the *Prélude*, the cellos' repeated staccato thirty-second figures also have a percussive effect (see example 7.1). The low cellos urgently produce a drum-like sonority on their G strings, with distinct staccato. This repeated staccato thirty-seconds are recalled at measure 85, where all the strings are muted (with the exception of the bass) and in a chordal arrangement, playing over to the fingerboard to provide a softly energetic background. The strings' *spiccato* articulation blends with the winds and also provides a cross-rhythm effect to them.

At measures 42 and 43 of *Sirènes*, repeated staccato thirty-seconds are again used. This time the *divisi* strings alternately play seventh chord (the violins grouping with the basses, the violas with the cellos). Debussy indicates "*avec la point del'archet*" (with the tip of the bow), implying a *jeté* stroke. This creates a very light and distinct sonority, similar to a ruff on a

snare drum. The many divisions of the strings here also create a heavy texture, with the violins in the higher register dominating the sonority (see example 6.19).

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *Sirènes*, measures 42. It features four staves for strings: Violins I, Violins II, Viola, and Cellos/Double Basses. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The strings are playing a dense, rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The Violins I part is in the highest register, while the Cellos/Double Basses are in the lowest. The score includes dynamic markings like 'pp' and 'avec la pointe de l'archet'.

Ex. 6.19. Debussy, *Sirènes*, mm. 42.

**6. Mute.** Muted strings can reduce the volume and produce a veiled sonority with fewer overtones. The bass has the ability to reduce its volume to a very soft level, and therefore is less often muted than the other strings. Debussy frequently uses the muted strings to create a delicate musical atmosphere (refer to the discussion in the strings' harmonic usage). In the *Prélude*, for example, at the first entrance of the strings in measure 5 (see example 8.3), muted violas and cellos combine with the basses and the

second harp to play a major-minor seventh chord delicately supporting the echoing horns. Similarly, in *Nuages*, *Sirènes* and the first movement of *La mer*, the first appearances of the strings (with the exception of basses) are muted (see example 5.27, 8.8 and 8.11). In these examples, the muted strings subtly decorate the musical background, either providing a sustained chordal support (as in the *Prélude* and *Nuages*), or creating a wave-like figure (in *Sirènes*), or providing a full octave sound (the first movement of *La mer*).

In *Nuages*, the strings are muted throughout, with the exception of the basses and solo strings. In a high register such as at measure 11, the muted violins not only have the ability to play a soft dynamic, they can also create a steel-like tone color with less vibration, which provides a distinct sonority to the musical milieu.

Sometimes, the muted strings are asked to play over to the fingerboard to produce an even more soft and unfocused sonority. In the *Prélude*, at measure 11, the second violins, violas, and cellos (all muted) play bowed tremolos over the fingerboard, creating a soft, vague and shimmering sound to accompany the solo flute. At measure 94, the strings, in multiple *divisi*, again muted and *sur la touche*, play fingered tremolos (the cellos play bowed tremolos), providing a delicate quivering background to the unison flutes' melody (see example 7.3).



**7. Multiple *Divisi*.** *Divisi* strings lessen the strength of individual notes but add a denser sonority and more exuberant texture to the orchestra. In Debussy's orchestral works, he employs strings' *divisi* very frequently to create delicate sonority and abundant texture. At the same time it seems to lessen the focus of the string section and thereby allows other instruments to be brought into relief. At measure 94 of the *Prélude* (see example 7.3), each section of the muted strings (without bass) is divided into two parts to play tremolos, delicately supporting the two flutes' melody. At the next measure, two solo violins, doubling at the octave, play a counter melody in a high register (originally from the oboe's melody at measure 39), contributing a penetrating tone color and adding another line to the delicate atmosphere.

Sometimes, Debussy combines various articulations in *divisi* strings, which not only helps to create a more abundant texture, but also produces different tone colors and clearly contrasting layers. In *Nuages*, at measure 43, the strings, muted and divided, combine with the legato and *pizzicato* articulation in their ostinato figuration to set clear layers as a background accompaniment for the English horn's tritone-based melody. Here, the light *pizzicati* provide delicate touches to the legato figures.

At measure 47 of the first movement of *La mer* (see example 6.7), the divided strings playing in a chordal arrangement are combined with the harp

to accompany, harmonically and rhythmically, the flute's sinuous solo melody. Here, the slurred staccatos of the second violins and the violas dominate the contour with the *pizzicato* strings lightly providing articulations.

**8. *Sur la touche* and *Sur le chevalet*.** When the strings are played over the fingerboard, *sur la touche*, a weaker, less focused sound is produced. Debussy seems to like to use this technique of the strings to create a hazy background. He often combines this technique with a tremolo, sometimes in muted strings, to produce a sound with even less presence. The combined usages of the bowed tremolo, mute, and *sur la touche*, can be found at measure 11 of the *Prélude* and at measure 82 of *Nuages*, where the strings provide a vague, trembling sonority as a background. At measure 94 of the *Prélude*, muted strings play fingered tremolo and *sur la touche* to create a fuzzy, somewhat shimmering atmosphere (see example 7.3).

When the strings are bowed close to the bridge, *sur le chevalet*, the sound is pinched, penetrating and less consistent. Debussy occasionally uses this sonority, combined with tremolo, to create an agitated, nervous effect. From measure 43 of the third movement of *La mer*, the low strings play repeated ascending scales (the second violins joining intermittently), with measured bowed tremolo and *sur le chevalet*. With crescendos, the strings'

penetrating tone color energizes the musical background, gradually pushing forward to a powerful conclusion of the first section. A similar usage of the measured bowed tremolo played close to the bridge is found in *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 4, at 69 (see example 6.20). Starting with the low strings, Debussy marks “*près du chevalet*” (close to the bridge) to ask for a pinched and agitated sonority of the tremolo strings. This moderates the effect and ensures more consistency than if it were simply marked *sur le chevalet*. The low strings, with the increasing dynamics and the joining of the violins and more winds, push the music forward to a strong ending of Act III.

69

Alt. *près du chevalet*  
 Vell. *près du chevalet*  
 C.B. *près du chevalet*

Ex. 6.20. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 4, at 69

**9. Characteristic Figuration.** Debussy wrote many special figurations for strings, not only to suggest the different characters in his music but also to create more complex and varied textures. In *Nuages*, the smooth quarter-note figure (strings starting at measure 11), mostly in multiple divisions, represents a slow moving cloud of various densities, with

their different layers in a wide range register. In *Fêtes*, the triplet ostinato figure (see example 6.17) and *pizzicati* (in the middle section, see example 7.5) reveal the percussive usage of the strings.

In the works associated with the sea, apart from using the fingered and bowed tremolos to imply the shimmering waves and the sea's unstable situation, Debussy creates many undulating figurations to imitate the various patterns of the sea wave. In *Sirènes*, at measure 26 (see example 6.21), seven different lines of strings are combined to produce a complex texture and imply mixed layers of the sea wave: the first and second violins double at the octave to play a nimble, repeated melody in a high register that clearly indicates the surface of the sea wave; the violas and the second part of the cellos produce undulated effects under the surface, with reversed arpeggio triplet figures. The first part of the cellos gives a cross-rhythmic effect to produce a more complex undulation; the divided basses' *pizzicati* provide a delicate touch to the wave.

Ex. 6.21. Debussy, *Sirènes*, mm. 26-27.

In the first movement of *La mer*, at measure 98, the violins double at the octave to play a distinctive rhythmic motif (see example 6.22). This motif with a hesitant dotted rhythmic character is originally found in the cello part at measure 86, and is used as an important element to create an energetic undulated effect to represent the uneven shape of the wave; it also becomes a huge surge at measure 105. This hesitant rhythmic motif is used again in the third movement of *La mer* (from measure 94, see example 8.15) and similarly produces a huge surging effect.



Ex. 6.22. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 98-99.

### Harp

The harp is an important instrument in Impressionistic compositions, as its shimmering presence can contribute effectively to a hazy atmosphere. Its low register has a sustained and sonorous quality, while the middle register has a warm and rich tone color; the high register produces a piercing, percussive effect. Because the plucking style of execution produces a similar articulation and sonority to *pizzicato* strings, composers often pair strings and harp. The harp's particular technique of *glissando* and arpeggio can produce a delicate atmosphere that may suggest a dream, a gentle wind, or fluid water — recurrent Impressionist themes.

In the four works being studied (and in almost all of Debussy's other orchestral works), two harps are consistently employed. Debussy not only treated the harp as an important instrument to create a fluid stream of sound from its *glissando* and arpeggio figurations, but he also used it effectively in

various melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic functions. The following study addresses these functions.

### **Melodic Usage**

Although the harp is usually employed with more harmonic than melodic function because of its thin tone quality in the upper register, in a delicate atmosphere, the harp's great resonance can create an exquisite effect to the melodic line. In the works being studied Debussy occasionally uses the harp to play melodies, either combined with other instruments or as a solo. Also, by employing harmonics, a high melody can be written which is played on middle range strings.

In *Nuages*, at measure 64, the flute and harp in unison play a pentatonic melody, the divided strings supported with a soft but dense harmonic background (see example 6.23). Here, the flute and the harp blend well while retaining their distinctive tone color. The harp adds a light articulation to the legato flute, contributing its resonance to this combination. The combination of the flute and the harp also reveals a similar sound effect to a Chinese flute combined with a *jeng* (a Chinese string instrument), which effectively conveys the Oriental flavor of the pentatonic melody. Apart from a modified repetition of this melody at measure 75, the harp is not used elsewhere in this movement, thus its appearance creates a fresh impression.

Un peu animé

1<sup>re</sup> Fl.

Cl.

1<sup>re</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Trompes

HARPE (Sol b, Ré b, La b, Mi b, Si b)

7 Un peu animé

The musical score is for measures 64-68 of Debussy's *Nuages*. It is a woodwind and string ensemble score. The top staves are for the first flute, clarinet, and first and second trumpets. The bottom staves are for the harp and strings. The tempo is 'Un peu animé'. The harp part is marked 'pp' and the strings are marked 'pp'. The score shows a melodic line in the woodwinds, with the harp and strings providing a harmonic accompaniment. The harp part is marked 'pp' and the strings are marked 'pp'. The score is in G major and 3/4 time.

Ex. 6.23. Debussy, *Nuages*, mm. 64-68.

At measure 43 of the first movement of *La mer*, the oboe at a higher octave dominates the melody, doubled with the harp and solo cello at an octave lower and the *pizzicato* basses at two octaves lower. Here, the harp in



its low register adds abundant resonance to the melody and blends with the *pizzicato* basses' rebounding articulation (see example 4.28).

Debussy seems to like to use the harps' delicate touch and fragrant resonance in a soft ending of a work. In the *Prélude*, in the final five measures, two harps in unison play a repeated octave descending figure (see example 8.5). In their middle register, the harps produce a warm sound, delicately emerging from the sustained chord of the muted horns and the strings. One measure later, the first harp plays harmonics, with a bell-like ringing tone color blending to the tinkling antique cymbals. Its light touch also provides delicate articulation to the quiet ending of this work.

In *Sirènes*, five measures before the end, the harp's bell-like harmonics are used in the ending (see example 6.24). Here, two harps in unison play a pentatonic melody, with harmonics lightly and clearly pinpointing the sustained B major triads of the violins, flutes, and the female voice (a major second dissonance occurs in the mezzo-sopranos but resolves to the tonic B at the end).

The musical score for Debussy's *Sirènes*, measures 142-146, is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments included are Flute (Fl.), 1st Harp (1<sup>re</sup> HARPE), 2nd Harp (2<sup>e</sup> HARPE), Mezzo-soprano (M. S.), Violin 1 (VI. 1), and Violin 2 (VI. 2). The Flute and Harps play a fluid pentatonic melody. The Mezzo-soprano has a soft splash sound. The Violins provide a warm tone color and exuberant resonance. The score is in E major and 3/4 time.

Ex. 6.24. Debussy, *Sirènes* mm. 142-146.

In the second movement of *La mer*, eleven measures from the end, the harps' fluid pentatonic melody floats gently in the air, with the low strings very softly supporting with an E major triad. The cymbals provide a soft splash sound. The harps' warm tone color and exuberant resonance in their

middle register provides a delicate atmosphere, with the pentatonic melody again creating an Oriental flavor.

### **Harmonic and Rhythmic Functions**

The harp's abundant resonance can create a wide vibrant color in the background, although it is not very effective in a strong *tutti*. In a less complex texture with a softer dynamic, the harp's resonance becomes a good tool to provide a fragrant tone color. In measures 2 to 5 of the first movement of *La mer*, two harps alternately play octaves to support the gradually emerging low strings (see example 8.11). The harps contribute great resonance to the dark tone color of the low strings.

When played as a rolling chord, the harp adds a sweeping sound, energizing the chord to produce a delicate touch to the harmony. Debussy frequently employs this technique in the works being studied. As in the *Prélude*, at measure 5, the second harp's rolling chord, following the first harp's *glissando*, combines with the low strings' sustained major-minor chord to delicately support the horns' echoing effect (see example 8.3).

A rolling chord in the harp has a wave effect and is used in *Pelléas* to imply water. In Act II, Scene I, one measure after 3, when Mélisande surprisingly exclaims "*Oh! L'eau est claire*" (Oh! How clear the water is),

the harp's rolling chord accompanies to produce the feeling of the water.

This is the first appearance of the harp in the opera (see example 6.25).

The musical score for Debussy's *Pelléas* Act II, scene 1, one mm. after [3], features the following parts and markings:

- Cors** (1<sup>re</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup>): *pp*
- 1<sup>re</sup> Harpe**: *p*
- V.ons** (Violons): *arco*, *pp*
- Alt.** (Alto): *pp*
- Vcl.** (Violoncelles): *pp*

The lyrics "Oh! l'eau est clai - re..." are written below the Violons staff.

Ex. 6.25. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act II, scene 1, one mm. after [3]

Debussy frequently groups the harp with the *pizzicato* strings to emphasize and reinforce their similar rebounding character and tone color. He also employs this percussive effect to serve rhythmically. At measure 116 of *Fêtes*, the second harp is combined with the *pizzicato* basses and the timpani to set up a soft regular rhythmic pattern (the cellos and the first harp

join later) for the three trumpets' fanfare later on. Here, apart from their rhythmic function, the harps' abundant resonance also creates a pious atmosphere to imply a solemn procession (see example 7.5).

Later in the same movement (at measure 210), the harp plays short chords combined with the *pizzicato* low strings, triplet high strings, and percussion to provide a harmonic and rhythmic support to the arching melody of the flutes and oboes. The harp's strong chords add wide vibration to the rhythmic background.

In the *Prélude*, at measure 31, the leaping octaves of the harp and the leaping thirds with grace notes in the next two measures reveal a percussive usage of the harp. Particularly, when the notes climb up to the high register, the vibration is reduced, and a dry, penetrating tone is produced to present a more percussive effect (see example 7.1).

At measure 126 of the second movement of *La mer*, two harps in unison play an octave A<sup>#</sup>, at the climax of the section. Here, the harps' eighth-note figure is the only moving line (apart from the rolling cymbal) that gives a regular beat to the sustained *tutti*. The harps not only dominate the rhythm as the sustained *tutti* gradually subsides, but in their high register, they contribute a crystalline tone color to the background.

## Creating an Atmosphere

The harp's most remarkable effect in an ensemble is undoubtedly its arresting *glissando* and wave-like arpeggio. In the four works being studied, Debussy uses these techniques effectively to create a floating background. He also saves these techniques for particular moments so as not to squander the freshness of the effect.

In the *Prélude*, the harp's *glissando* is used effectively to imply the dream-like situation of the Faun. At measures 4, the harps' *glissando* motivates the sustained chord of the oboes and clarinets and the horn calls, and also opens a wider space to the constricted chord. Here, the dream-like situation of the Faun is vividly suggested by the sweeping sound of the harp. The same *glissando* occurs at measure 7, right after a silence, again, extending the musical space (see examples 8.2 and 8.3).

In *Fêtes*, the harp's *glissando* is used only once at measure 26. Here, Debussy employs two harps to play an octave-doubling D<sup>b</sup> Mixolydian scale, joining the timpani's crescendo rolling to serve as bridge to the lively staccato woodwind passage (see example 7.4). Two harps playing *glissando* together can produce a strong effect; because the *glissandi* cannot be perfectly coordinated, the doubled harp sonority is particularly rich. Two harps are combined to play an octave scale *glissando* at measure 135 of the

first movement of *La mer*, where, the harps reinforce the strings with a *crescendo* to push forward the music to its powerful ending.

In the second movement of *La mer*, at measures 48 and 52 (a reprise occurs at measures 225 and 229), Debussy employs two harps alternately to play a chordal setting of *glissandi* (see example 6.26), which effectively serve as a change of tone color from the previous string-dominated passage, and also start a new phrase. At the top of the first harp's ascending line, the triangle, with its tinkling sound, blends with the harps' percussive effect in a high register and gives a bright articulation to the sonority.

Ex. 6.26. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 52-55.

*Glissandi* on the harp tend to dominate a musical texture. By contrast, Debussy uses the harp's arpeggio in an accompaniment role to create an

undulating and discrete background. In the *Prélude*, apart from being used to delicately accompany the solo flute and oboe, the harp's arpeggio is effectively employed in the middle section (at measure 63, see example 7.2) to create a romantic atmosphere to accompany the strings' lyrical melody. This passage vividly suggests the Faun's passion. Here, Debussy uses two harps in unison to produce a fuller sonority.

In the first movement of *La mer*, Debussy employs the harp's arpeggio to provide an undulating figuration. At measure 105, two harps in unison play a downward octave arpeggio, combined with the strings' hesitant dotted rhythm to create a dense undulating background (see example 4.2). At the coda (starting from measure 132), the first harp's arpeggio not only provides a wave-like background, the first note of each arpeggio doubles the flutes' melody, adding an attack and light resonance to the melody. The second harp, with a slower rhythm, also highlights the melody (see example 6.27).



14 Très lent (80 =  $\frac{1}{2}$ )

Fl. 1<sup>re</sup> *pp*

Fl. 2<sup>e</sup> et 3<sup>e</sup> *pp mais très soutenu*

Clar. *pp mais très soutenu*

Bass. *pp mais très soutenu*

1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Tr. *sans Sordine*

3<sup>e</sup> Tr. *sans Sordine*

4<sup>e</sup> Tr. *ppp*

Harp *pp*

Ex. 6.27. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 132-133.

In the second movement of *La mer*, the harp's arpeggios are often found combined with the bell's tinkling sound to produce a bright tone color in the background. At measures 2 and 4, the bell and the harps alternately play arpeggio figures. The bell's tinkling sound and the harps' abundant resonance in their middle register, together with the splash cymbals contribute a bright color, contrast to the woodwinds' low sustained chord and the tremolo strings (see example 8.13). At measure 60, a similar usage

of the bell and harp's alternating arpeggio figures occurs, and again the cymbals' splash sound serves as accompaniment.

In *Pelléas*, Debussy's employment of the harp's technique is similar to that in the other three works, with the harp's tone color and its sweeping sound effect often used to refer to water, and light, and to create a fragrant atmosphere. Debussy saves the harp in Act I and uses it in Act II scene 1, *Une fontaine dans le parc* (A fountain in the park), showing its special connection to the water. The harp's first appearance, at one measure after [3], is to accompany the surprised feeling of Mélisande as she discovers a pool in the park (see example 6.25). In the same scene, two measures before [9], when Mélisande sights something moving in the pool, the first harp's *glissando* creates a glistening effect, providing an image of the water's undulation or a reflection of the light from the moving object (see example 6.28).

The musical score is for Debussy's *Pelléas*, Act II, scene 1, 3 mm. before 9. It is a full orchestral score with vocal parts. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The harp part features a 'Glissando' section. The vocal parts include French lyrics: 'Oh! oh!', 'J'ai vu pas quelque chose au fond de', and 'voulez-vous pas?'. The string section is marked 'pizz f'.

Ex. 6.28. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act II, scene 1, 3 mm. before 9.

In Act II, scene 3, at 42, two harps alternately play *glissandi* to present an image of the light in the sea cave as seen by Pelléas. Here, the abundant resonance of the harps' *glissandi* again creates a glistening background to decorate the woodwinds in their bright high register, and, combined with the tremolo strings, vividly suggests the shimmering light in the grotto (see example 6.29).

un peu en dehors

Fl. *p* doux et expressif *un peu en dehors* *p*

Hr. *p* doux et expressif *p*

Cl. *pp*

1. 2. *pp*

1. 3. sans sourdines 1<sup>re</sup> 2<sup>e</sup> 3<sup>e</sup> *p*

*mf* glissando

glissando

Ob. *pp*

Ob. .... unci ta clar. te

42

div. *pin p* *pp* *pp*

*pin p* *pp* *pp*

*pin p* *pp* *pp*

Ex. 6.29. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act II, scene 3, 42.

At the beginning of Act III, the first harp's moving octaves with the support of the sustained B in the flutes and the violas' and cellos' harmonics, delicately provide a fragrant atmosphere to set the scene for the beautiful night in the castle tower. The *pizzicato* violins, blending with the harp's percussive effect in its high register, give a light articulation (see example 6.30).

**Doux et calme**

3 FLÛTES

2 HARPES

**Doux et calme**

1<sup>re</sup> VIOLONS  
sourdines

2<sup>e</sup> VIOLONS  
sourdines

ALTOS

VIOLONCELLES

CONTREBASSES

Ex. 6.30. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 1, beginning.

In Act IV, scene 4, the harp's arpeggio figures are used to imply the warm, emotional aspect of the love between Pelléas and Mélisande. At one

measure before [44], when Mélisande tells Pelléas that she has loved him since their first meeting, the harp's arpeggio, with abundant resonance from the middle register gradually ascending, provides a warm, delicate sonority that amply expresses the depth of her feelings for Pelléas. At [51], after the silence during which Pelléas and Mélisande embrace, the harp's ascending arpeggio contrasts with the descending upper strings, again creating a warm sound for the intimate atmosphere.

The harp continues to provide its warm sonority to accompany Pelléas' passion; when he praises the beauty of the dark night, the harp's arpeggio, two measures before [52], combines with the ascending upper strings to create a resonant background. With rolling chords, the two harps give a delicate touch and exuberant resonance to close this affectionate passage (see example 6.31).

très retenu **52** Animez: nombre et inquiet

Fl. *pp très expressif* Prenez la 1<sup>re</sup> Flûte

Cl. *pp très expressif*

Corn. *pp*

Trb. *pp*

Timb. *pp*

1<sup>re</sup> II. *pp*

2<sup>e</sup> II. *pp* (*lento ment arpeggiato*)

M. *pp* Il y a quelqu'un

P. *pp* qu'il fait beau dans les te - ne - bres...

V. *pp* *dim.* *pp* *dim.* *pp* *dim.* *pp* *ppizz*

Ait. *pp* *ppizz* *pp* *ppizz*

V. *pp* *ppizz* *arco* *pp*

C. B. *ppp* *pp*

Ex. 6.31. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 4, four mm. before **52**.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **ORCHESTRATION AS AN ARTICULATION OF FORM**

Form in music is created by a judicious alternation of repetition and contrast. In works of the Western Art tradition, with their clear-cut formal structures, the different sections of the form are realized at distinctive turning points, where the tonal and thematic materials undergo a significant transformation. Particularly in the Classical and early Romantic periods, when sonata form was the dominant structure of instrumental music, tonal structure, correlated closely with thematic material, was the defining characteristic of form in a work. In Classical symphonic music, for example, texture and orchestration were often used to reaffirm the structural basis of tonality; natural horns and trumpets had clear diatonic roles, centered around the tonic key, while timpani were usually tuned to the tonic and dominant pitches of the movement's key. Thus, a full *tutti* could only occur in the tonic key and so significant formal turning points—exposition, recapitulation, and final cadences—were likely to be signaled by a full sonority.



In Debussy's works, the traditional tonal-based formal structure is not so apparent because of his evasion of the major-minor key system; instead, Debussy favored the usage of modes, whole-tone and pentatonic scales, and non-functional harmony. Although the harmonic environment is still an important aspect of the understanding of Debussy's works, it is not the only factor that dictates the formal structure. Motivic ideas, instrumental timbre, rhythmic elements, dynamic design, as well as changes of tempo, changes of texture, and changes of articulation may all become important aspects in interpreting the formal structure of Debussy's works.

The nontraditional formal construction in Debussy's works has engendered many studies, each with a distinctive approach. Roy Howat, in his *Debussy in Proportion* directly relates some of Debussy's mature works (*La mer*, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, *Jardins sous la pluie*, *Movement*, *Hommage à Rameau* among others) to the principle of the Golden Section.<sup>45</sup> Trezise, in his *Debussy: La Mer*, considers the motivic elements in his formal analysis of *La mer*.<sup>46</sup> Although these studies have not become standard models, they suggest multifaceted possibilities to the understanding of Debussy's unorthodox formal structure in his works.

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<sup>45</sup> Roy Howat, *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 136-153.

<sup>46</sup> Trezise, 60.

Debussy's orchestration techniques and style are very original and evocative; however, they serve not only to suggest various images and moods, but are also important factors in the formal construction of the works themselves. In this chapter, Debussy's orchestration will be examined in order to demonstrate how it reflects a close relationship with formal structure. The following works or movements will be studied: the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, *Fêtes* and the second movement of *La mer*. The *Prélude* is closely based on Mallarmé's poem of the same name, an important factor in its organization. *Fêtes* has a distinctive structure that is not often seen in Debussy's works. The structure of the second movement of *La mer*, with its free, whimsical character, has elicited different interpretations from different authors.

In *Pelléas*, the form is subjugated to the demands of the text and mood and, as such, resists traditional approaches to formal analysis.<sup>47</sup> As Robert Orledge states in his *Debussy and the Theatre*, "it represents a direct musical response to a given scenario or dramatic text, almost in what might be termed cinematographic 'moment' form."<sup>48</sup> The orchestral colors and effects that relate to the events or mood in the opera will be studied in the

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<sup>47</sup> Compare to Berg's *Wozzeck*, which contains many hidden structures such as passacaglia, sonata form, variation...etc.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 88.

next chapter; because plot and text are more important to the opera's structure than orchestration, it will not be discussed in this chapter.

### *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

Based on Mallarmé's poem, Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* has 110 measures, which is the same number of the lines as in the poem; surely this is no coincidence. Arthur Wenk, in his *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, analyzes the structures of both the poem and the music in an arching A B A' form and illustrates their relative sections.<sup>49</sup> William Austin emphasizes the continuity of the *Prélude*:

Every parts of this music clings to every other part so firmly, so naturally, that it is hard to identify parts when we want to talk about them. . . While we listen, the parts seem to overlap each other, so that the continuity of the whole work is extraordinarily smooth. . .<sup>50</sup>

Austin lists five important articulation points (at measure 30-31, 37, 55, 79, and 94). He also provides different opinions about the form of this work among various authors and subsumes their discrepancies in an A B A' formal structure, including whether the B section starts at measure 31 or 37.

The *Prélude* is analyzed in an A B A' form in table 11, with the B section starting at measure 31, which is based on the realization of the

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<sup>49</sup> Arthur Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 161-162.

<sup>50</sup> William Austin, "Toward an Analytical Appreciation," *Prelude to "the Afternoon of a Faun": An Authoritative Score*, ed. William Austin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1970), 71.

orchestration and the musical milieu that corresponds to Mallarmé's poem.

This corresponds to my personal understanding of the work.

Table 11. Formal Structure and Orchestration of the *Prélude*

Section	mm.	Leading Instrument	Predominant Background Timbre
A	1	fl.	
	11	fl., ob.	str. (tremolo), cl. (chord)
	21	fl.	hp. (arpeggio), vc (chord), cb. (pizz)
	26	fl.	hp. (arpeggio), hr., str. (chord)
B	31	cl.	hr. (chord), hp. (8va, leap), vc. (stac.)
	37	ob.	bsn., vl., vla. (chord)
	55	woodwinds	str. (chord, syncopated rhythm)
A'	79	fl.	hp. (arpeggio), str. (chord)
	86	ob.	hp. (arpeggio), str. (chord)
	94	2 fls.	str. (tremolo), ant. cym.
	100	fl., vc.	hp. (arpeggio), cl., bsn., hr., vl., cb. (chord)
	106	harps	str. hr. (chord), fl.

In Austin's analyses, a very distinctive orchestral timbre occurs at each of the five articulation points. The first one is at measure 30-31 (see example 7.1), where the clarinet is given the solo melody. It is the first time that an instrument other than flute starts a passage, and is significant in that it is the only phrase in the work that begins with a pickup. The harp's

rebounding octave notes and the cellos' *staccato* articulation (followed by a sinuous figure) create an active atmosphere. In Mallarmé's poem, the verses in italics, some thirty lines set in three different sections, are, in contrast to the standard type of the verses, clearer images, distinct from the Faun's memories of what has happened in the afternoon. Those lines reflect a more active motion and lively atmosphere. The first section of italicized verses is from line 26 to 31; the warming pipes and the fleeing naiads described in line 30 and 31 are vividly reflected in the orchestration by the clarinet's pickup and the rebounding harp and cellos. This articulation is the first turning point in the work, and the distinctive orchestration vividly reflects the atmosphere of the poem. The opening of a new musical passage that relates to the clear section in the poem is the justification for my analysis of this point as the beginning of the B section.

Ex. 7.1. Debussy, *Prélude* mm. 30-33.

At measure 37 (see example 4.18), the oboe initiates a new melody (actually, it can also be considered to be a transformation of the flute's melody). The change of timbre to oboe provides a new impulse to the music, and its focused sonority and more disjunct melody energizes the musical argument.

From measure 55 to 78, the clearest section with a distinctive character, the music undergoes the most drastic change, as the lyrical melody reflects the passionate, amorous emotion of the Faun. At measure 55, the

lyrical melody is first played by the woodwinds in octave doublings, which is the only place in the work where a long melody appears in such a full texture. The woodwinds in octave doublings produce a full sonority, with the syncopated upper strings energizing the musical atmosphere (see example 8.4). As the melody is transferred to the strings doubled in octaves at measure 63, and with the harps' arpeggios and the woodwinds' cross-rhythmic support, the texture of the orchestra becomes full, and intense (see example 7.2). The orchestration is extraordinary in this section, clearly presenting a climax of this work. The dynamic also reaches its apex, the only fortissimo in the piece, at measure 70. It is clear from the combination of all these elements that this middle section undoubtedly constitutes the high point of this piece.





background, which counterbalances with the tremolo strings at measure 11.

Debussy also provides a noble sonority by adding the antique cymbals at this articulation point (see example 7.3); the image of its sound will be discussed in next chapter.

**Dans le 1<sup>er</sup> mouv<sup>t</sup> avec plus de langueur**

Fl. *p expressif et doux*

Cl. *p*

COR *pp*

GYM. ANT. *pp*

DEUX 1<sup>er</sup> *sans sordines* *pp très doux et expressif*

1<sup>er</sup> V<sup>es</sup> *sur la touche* *pp*

2<sup>es</sup> V<sup>es</sup> *sur la touche* *pp*

ALTO II *sur la touche* *pp*

Div. *sur la touche* *pp*

Ex. 7.3. Debussy, *Prélude*, mm. 94-95.

The oboe replaces the flute to play the solo melody at measure 86, also an important changing point of the orchestra color. Here, the background remains the same as in the previous passage, but the switch from the flute to the oboe, pitched a half step lower, provides a subtle articulation of the orchestral timbre. It is also worth noticing that the flute's solo melody is accompanied differently on each of its seven repetitions in the outer sections, showing Debussy's delicate use of orchestration to articulate the formal structure.

### *Fêtes*

*Fêtes* has a clear ternary form, A B A' following by a Coda. This straightforward structure is not often seen in Debussy's orchestra works. In *Fêtes*, a lively, active festival atmosphere is vividly reflected in the first and third sections, where the agility of the woodwind instruments are used to dominate the melodic lines, and the strings serve a rhythmic function with their percussive effects. Debussy writes distinctive layers of color in the woodwind melody and the string accompaniment. Table 12 is a summary of my formal analysis of the movement.

Table 12. Formal Structure and Orchestration of *Fêtes*

Section	mm.	Leading Instrument	Predominant Background Timbre
A	1	Eh., cl. (m.3)	vl. (rhythmic)
	9	fl., ob. (m.11)	vla., vc., cb. (rhythmic)
	15	Eh., cl., bsn.	fl., ob., cl., vl. (rhythmic), cb.(chord)
	27	Eh., cl., bsn.	str. (pizz)
	39	hr., bsn.	
	54	ob.	vl., vla. (rhythmic)
	70	fl., ob., cl.	str. (rhythmic), bsn., hr. (chord)
	82	cl., bsn.	str. (rhythmic), hr. (chord), timb.
	98	woodwinds	str. (rhythmic), timb.
	110	str.	str., woodwind, hr.
B	116	hp., timb.,cb. (pizz)	
	124	tp.	hp., timb.,vc., cb. (pizz)
	140	woodwinds	str. (rhythmic), timb.
	156	tp., tbn., vl., vla.	tutti
A'	174	fl.	ob., Eh., cl., vc. (rhythmic)
	190	vl.	ob., cl., low str.
	202	tp.	vl. (rhythmic)
	208	Eh., cl., bsn.	vl., hr., vc., cb. (pizz)
	232	vc., cb., bsn.	
Coda	252	ob.	vl., vla. (pizz), tuba
	260	hr., Eh., cl.	vl., vla. (pizz), vc., cb.
	266	vc., cb., timb. M.	

In the first two passages of the first section, the woodwinds are separated into two groups, English horn with clarinet, flute with oboe, to provide a change of color to the recurring melody. The accompanying strings are also changed from the beginning violins' high register to the low strings (at measure 9). This change of color provides a subtle articulation to the form.

At measure 27, a new motif with a mixed 15/8 rhythm is introduced in the English horn, clarinets and bassoons. A *glissando* by the harps appears only at measure 26, where it joins the rolling timpani to serve as a bridge connecting the passage to the following fast section, and also providing an articulation at the turning point (see example 7.4).

The image shows a page of a musical score for Debussy's *Fêtes*, measures 24-27. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for CDA ANG., CL., CHANG. en LA, COR., TRUMP., TROMB., 1st HARPE, 2nd HARPE, TIMP., CYMB., and BASS. The tempo is marked 'A tempo' and the mood is 'Un peu plus animé'. The score shows a change in dynamics and orchestral timbre at measure 116, with the harps playing a regular rhythmic pattern in a low register, joined by timpani and pizzicato basses.

Ex. 7.4. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 24-27.

In the middle section, beginning at measure 116, a sudden change of dynamics and orchestral timbre clearly articulates the new section. A slow, regular rhythmic pattern is played by the harps in a low register, joined by timpani and the *pizzicato* basses (see example 7.5). Here, the orchestral

timbre is dark and resonant, in contrast to the bright and energized first section and it provides an extraordinary articulation to the formal structure.

Modéré mais toujours très rythmé

The musical score is for Debussy's *Fêtes*, measures 116-124. It is written for a full orchestra. The tempo is 'Modéré mais toujours très rythmé'. The score includes parts for Trompe (Sourdines), 1st Harpe, 2nd Harpe, Timb., and Violoncelles. The dynamics are marked ppp, pp, and p. The score shows a gradual approach of a procession, with the middle section starting at measure 124.

Ex. 7.5. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 116-124.

The middle section is a vivid portrayal of a procession advancing from the distance. To present the gradual approach of the procession, three different dynamics and orchestral timbres are employed after the starting point of the middle section: at measure 124, three muted trumpets softly play

the fanfare (see example 5.14); at measure 140, the woodwind *tutti* replaces the trumpets produce a fuller sonority with increasing dynamics to imply the approaching procession (see example 8.6); at measure 156 (see example 8.7), the powerful orchestral *tutti* presents the combination of the procession and the festival (with trumpets and trombones playing the fanfare, the upper strings doubled in three octave playing the arching melody, and the woodwind, horns, low strings, and percussion supporting the energetic rhythm). At the last passage of the middle section, the *tutti* gradually pushes the music forward to an explosive high point. The change of orchestral timbre in this middle section presents a good example of the orchestration providing articulation to the form.

Two flutes play the arching melody at the beginning of the reprise section (m. 174), but without the repetition of the mixed sonority of the first section. The rhythmic background is also newly arranged, with the double reeds leading the tone color. Here, the distinctive layers of melody and accompaniment are retained, and the change of color is very subtle (see example 7.6).



1° tempo

Fl.

Hautb.

Cl.

Fag.

Cb.

pp

Div.

pp

Ex. 7.6. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 174-179.

At the coda, beginning at measure 252, the oboe's melancholy tone color, played in a suddenly reduced tempo, very clearly articulates a particular passage (an imaginative scene that is discussed in the next chapter). The *pizzicato* violins and violas also provide a delicate touch to the background (see example 4.19).

### *Jeux de vagues*

The second movement of *La mer*, *Jeux de vagues*, has a free, whimsical formal structure, which invites many different analytical approaches. Cox refers it to a kind of scherzo form, but with an untraditional

development of quick change and overlapping of texture.<sup>51</sup> Howat analyzes this movement from both thematic and tonal aspects and proposes an overlapping binary system.<sup>52</sup>

Max Pommer analyzes this movement as a ternary form with an introduction and coda: A—measures 36-59; B—measures 60-162; A—measures 163-218; coda—measure 219 to the end.<sup>53</sup> Based mainly on the tonal structure, Marie Rolf gives this movement a three-part structure with an introduction: Part One—from measure 36 (E tonal center); Part Two—from measure 92 (A tonal center); Part Three—from measure 163 (E tonal center).<sup>54</sup>

Trezise analyzes this movement as a four-part structure, with subdivisions in the first two parts;<sup>55</sup> the following study will follow this analysis, but with certain modifications. The form summarized in Table 13 is based on Trezise's analysis of the structural design of *Jeux de vagues*, but it includes more subdivisions in the third and fourth parts, according mainly to important changes of thematic aspects and orchestral color, in accordance with my understanding of this movement.

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<sup>51</sup> David Cox, *Debussy Orchestral Music* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1974), 29.

<sup>52</sup> Howat, 111.

<sup>53</sup> Discussed in Marie Rolf, *Debussy's La mer: a critical analysis in the light of early sketches and editions* (Ph.D. dissertation, Eastman School of Music, 1976), 156.

<sup>54</sup> Rolf, 181.

<sup>55</sup> Trezise, 62.

Table 13. Formal Structure and Orchestration of *Jeux de vagues*

Section	mm.	Leading Instrument	Predominant Background Timbre
Part 1	1	Eh., cl., bsn.	vl., vla. (tremolo), vc., cb. (pizz)
	9	Eh.	str. (tremolo), hp., bell
	28	hr.	Eh., hp., cym.
Part 2	36	vl.	woodwinds
	48	hp. (gliss.)	vc.
	60	fl., cl.	hr. (chord), bell, hp., cym.
	72	hr., cl., Eh.	str. (pizz), fl., ob.
	82	solo vl.	vl., vla. (tremolo)
	92	picc., hr., ob.	vl., vla. (tremolo), vc. (pizz), tp.
	104	hr., tp.	str. (pizz)
	118	ob., cl.	str. (tremolo)
	124	tp.	str. (tremolo), Eh., cl., bsn., hr.(chord)
	147	vl., vla., Eh., cl.	vc., cb. (pizz), trg., cym., hr.,
Part 3	163	fl.	str., Eh., cl., bsn.
	187	vl., vla.	hp., vc. (pizz), cb.
Part 4	219	vla., vc.	bsn., cb.,
	225	hp. (gliss.)	vc., cb., cym.
	237	fl.	hp., bell, hr., str.
	245	picc.	tp., str. (chord)

The changeable style of the formal structure in this movement is not only reflected in the various thematic and tonal aspects, but is also shown in the unsettled orchestral timbre. Table 13 includes the main dominating orchestral timbre in terms of the leading instrument, as well as the background at each important changing point of the form. Among all the changing points of *Jeux de vagues*, the same leading instruments along with the same background timbres are rarely found. This unpredictable orchestral color adds to the movement's capricious character.

One of the rare examples of a repeating timbre is the harp's *glissando* at measure 48 and 52 (part 1, see example 6.26), and its reprises at measure 225 and 229 (part 4), both with similar quiet backgrounds. These two articulation points also serve a transitional function to herald new passages. A similar usage of the harp's *glissando* can be found in *Fêtes* (see example 7.4).

The beginning of the second part is realized by Pommer and Rolf as the starting point of the first main section after the introduction (the first part, in this analysis). At measure 36, the violins, doubling at the octave, dominate the timbre (see example 7.7), for the first time in this movement; this important change in orchestral timbre has led me to consider this to be the articulation point of the main part of the movement.

**Assez animé (138 =  $\text{♩}$ )**

**Assez animé (138 =  $\text{♩}$ )**

Ex. 7.7. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 36-39.

The motivic return starts from measure 92 (see example 7.8). In Rolf's analysis, this is the beginning of Part Two, where a tonal center based on A begins. Here, the oboe repeats the tritone motif from measure 9, and a new chromatic motif is played by a distinctive combination: the piccolo and

horn doubling two octaves apart, with the tremolo violas in the middle.

Because the new motif is strengthened and becomes the dominating material, the return motif is unclear, even though the shimmering effect from the tremolo violins and violas with the *pizzicato* cellos recalls a similar orchestral effect from the beginning of the movement and at measure 9.

Debussy employs an old orchestral effect as the background and mixes it with a new color and motif, illustrating his subtle design of orchestration.

au Mouvt (112 =  $\frac{1}{2}$ )

G $\sharp$  Fl. *pp*

Pic Fl. *pp*

Hrb. *p* *Solo*

Cor A. *pp*

Cl. *pp*

Bass *pp*

Corno *pp*

Tromp. *pp*

au Mouvt (112 =  $\frac{1}{2}$ )

Div. I *pp*

Div. II *pp*

Arco *pp*

Ex. 7.8. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 92-94.

Because Part 3 features a clear motivic return of Part 1, Pommer regards this as a reprise section. Here, instead of violins as in Part 1, the leading instrument is changed to flutes (see example 7.9). The background is also more complex, with the joining of the strings' three different ostinato figures and first violins' trills. Again, Debussy creates a new orchestral effect to underscore the return of the theme.



Animé (138 =  $\frac{1}{2}$ )

The musical score is for Debussy's *La mer* II, measures 163-168. It is marked 'Animé (138 =  $\frac{1}{2}$ )'. The score is for a full orchestra and includes vocal parts. The top system shows the vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and the piano parts (Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Glockenspiel, Harp, and Cello/Double Bass). The bottom system shows the piano parts (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass). The tempo is marked 'Animé (138 =  $\frac{1}{2}$ )'.

Ex. 7.9. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 163-168.

The beginning of the coda, at measure 219, is an extended passage subsiding from the previous high point. To stop the momentum of the fast running figure and to set this movement in a tranquil ending, Debussy creates two articulation points within the coda. The first is at measure 225;

the harps' *glissandi* smooth out the energized low strings. The second is at measure 237; the flutes' velvety tone color in their low register softly lies on a delicate background of the sustained chord of the horns and strings, with the harps' resonance and the bell's tinkling adding to the light and prolonging the sounding effect (see example 7.10). In these two places, the orchestral color provides an important articulation to the form.

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Fl. *pp*

Cor A. *p très doux (mais en dehors)*

Cl.

Viol. I *pp*

Viol. II *pp*

Viola *pp*

Cello *pp*

Double Bass *pp*

Piano *pp*

Harp *p*

Voice *pp*

Disc *pp*

Pizza *pp*

Ex. 7.10. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 237-242.

## CHAPTER VIII

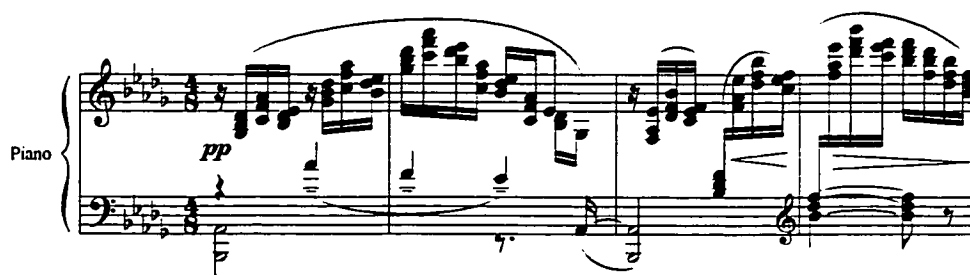
### ORCHESTRATION AS A PURVEYOR OF IMAGE AND EMOTION

Debussy wrote very little absolute music. The only significant works containing no extra musical references in their title or contents are: *String Quartet* op.10, the *Rhapsody* for clarinet and orchestra, the *Rhapsody* for saxophone and piano (orchestration sketched by Debussy, completed by Jean Roger-Ducasse), and the three late sonatas for cello and piano, flute, viola and harp, and violin and piano, respectively. His Etudes for piano could be considered to belong to this category, but their stated intention is decidedly pedagogical. Apart from these examples of absolute music, most of Debussy's works have some kind of extra-musical dimension.

Debussy was not bound by traditional considerations of form and harmony. His love of art and poetry, and his association with artists and poets, established the basis of his aesthetic. The most important non-musical influences on Debussy's compositions are Impressionistic paintings and Symbolist poetry. These materials often provided vivid inspiration, stimulating Debussy in his composition. Therefore, to speculate upon the

effects presented or implied in Debussy's music becomes an important aspect in achieving an understanding of his works.

Color and light are fundamental elements in painting; they also have an important influence on Debussy's concept of music. In a letter to his student, Raoul Bardac,<sup>56</sup> Debussy states that music can sometimes express color and light even better than paintings, because music "can centralize variations of colour and light within a single picture — a truth generally ignored, obvious as it is. . ."<sup>57</sup> In many of Debussy's works color and light are vividly suggested to the listener's imagination; for example, in the first movement of the first set of his *Images* for piano, *Reflets dans l'eau* ("Reflections in water"), the effects of different layers of light are reflected in the various shapes of chords and arpeggios (see the beginning of the work in example 8.1).



Ex. 8.1. Debussy, *Image*, Set 1, *Reflets dans l'eau*, mm. 1-4.

<sup>56</sup> Raoul Bardac is the son of Emma (Debussy's second wife) and Sigismund Bardac. He is one of Debussy's students.

<sup>57</sup> Lesure and Nichols, 166.

Because of the many different timbres of instruments, color and light are fashioned even more vividly in Debussy's orchestral works. He was also skillful in implying a sense of space in his orchestral works. Both of these topics will be explored below.

From the 1880s, Debussy associated with French Symbolists such as Mallarmé and Maeterlinck, and gradually absorbed their poetic aesthetic into his compositional style. The mysterious, esoteric, and indefinite style of the Symbolists' poetry became one of the most important characteristics in Debussy's music. Debussy defined music to his friend Prince Poniatowski: "Music is a dream from which the veils have been lifted. It's not even the expression of a feeling, it's the feeling itself."<sup>58</sup> A close connection with the Symbolist is evident in both his *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, and the opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

In each of the four works under consideration, an extra-musical association provides not only inspiration for a work, but helps to dictate its orchestral coloring and form. *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is loosely based on the poem of the same name by Mallarmé. Inspired by the poem, Debussy was trying to create a musical atmosphere to suggest the confused impression of dream and reality reflected in Mallarmé's poem. Each of the

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<sup>58</sup> Lesure and Nichols, 41.

three movements of *Nocturnes* has an evocative title that suggests a particular scenario. In the case of *Sirènes*, we have the additional reference to the story of the mysterious goddesses who sing to entice sailors to sail to their deaths on the rocks. *La mer* again has a suggestive title for each movement, each describing the different characteristics of the sea and light. The libretto of the opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, provides clear dramatic development and more explicit emotion. One can correlate Debussy's use of orchestration with the feelings of the characters as well as the physical atmosphere in each of the scenes.

Music penetrates directly to the subconscious, without recourse to symbols. If he is to stimulate the imagination of his listeners, a composer must state an intended image that he is trying to evoke in music in a specific manner. In the four works being studied, the extra-musical ideas that are presented presumably aroused the imagination of Debussy and in turn provide the same function for the listeners. When studying Debussy's music, it is useful to imagine its meaning and effect; this will offer a deeper understanding of the music. From an examination of orchestration, this chapter aims to illuminate possible relationships between Debussy's music and pictorial and emotional phenomena.

*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

Debussy not only adopted the title of Mallarmé's poem, but apparently modeled the 110 measures of his musical *Prélude* on the identical numbers of lines in the poem. Assuming that this numerical symmetry is not mere coincidence, it indicates an interesting correspondence between the structures of each work.

Arthur Wenk analyses the poem as comprising an introduction, three main sections and a conclusion. He considers Debussy's music to have (or, at least to demonstrate) the same design (see footnote 49). He also enumerates many valuable points in supporting his argument. The poem's evolution from the first line of the poem "Ces nymphes, je les veux perpétuer,"<sup>59</sup> resembles the music that emanates from the opening flute solo.<sup>60</sup> The dominant seventh chord at measure 8 is like a questioning as in the poem's "Aimai-je un rêve?"<sup>61</sup>

But, on the other hand, Lockspeiser, in his book *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, argues that to seek in Debussy's *Prélude* a close illustration of the dark symbolism of Mallarmé's poem would be incongruous. He also cites Debussy's own words in regarding the *Prélude* as "a very free illustration

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<sup>59</sup> In Mallarmé's poem two different types of typography, italic and standard, are used. All the quotations from the poem in this chapter observe the original typography of the poem.

<sup>60</sup> Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 163.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.



and in no way as a synthesis of the poem."<sup>62</sup> Lockspeiser claims that it is the aesthetic of Mallarmé's poem that provides the inspiration for Debussy's composition.

Whether or not one argues on the correlation of specific lines of the poem with passages of music, the relationship between these two works can be clearly demonstrated. In his *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, Mallarmé was trying to create poetry that resembled music in its fluidity and ambiguity of ideas. Motivated by the poem, Debussy, conversely, intended to apply music to replicate the vague impressions of Mallarmé's poem. Debussy himself stated that ". . . it is the general impression of the poem. If the music were to follow it more closely it would run out of breath,"<sup>63</sup> But, he admits; "All the same it follows the ascending shape of the poem as well as the scenery so marvelously described in the text. . ."<sup>64</sup> The following examination of Debussy's orchestration in the *Prélude* aims to illustrate his ingenuity in reflecting the poetic symbolism and image of Mallarmé's work.

### **Orchestration Aspects of Image**

In his poem, Mallarmé calls forth several definite musical instruments: flute (line 16, "Ne murmure point d'eau que ne verse ma flûte"), reeds (line

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<sup>62</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1962), vol. 1, 153.

<sup>63</sup> Lesure and Nichols, 84.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

26, "*Que je coupais ici les creux roseaux domptés*"), pipes (line 30, "*Et qu'au prélude lent où naissant les pipeaux*"), double reeds (line 43, "*Le jonc vaste et jumeau dont sous l'azur on joue*"). Debussy adopts these sonorities, using the flute as the major solo instrument, with oboe and clarinet as a secondary solo instruments. Lockspeiser points out that the opening flute solo in the *Prélude* is directly related to a line in the poem: "Une sonore, vaine et monotone ligne."<sup>65</sup> Aside from the direct relevance of these particular instruments, Debussy's usage of instruments seems to provide images similar to those created by Mallarmé in the poem: for examples, harp *glissandi* suggest the breeze and the dream-like atmosphere (measures 4 and 7, see example 8.2 and 8.3); string tremolos represent the thickets (measure 11); horns imply a sense of distance with their echoing figures (measures 5, see example 8.3); antique cymbals, the only percussion instrument employed in the work, symbolize the twinkling light of the star (from measure 94, see example 7.1 and 8.5). Also, by omitting trumpet, trombone and timpani from the score, Debussy avoids brilliant and heavy sound effects that would suggest a too clear-cut impression of the real world.

One of the important atmospheres in the poem is the obscurity between dream and reality, which is interpreted ingeniously in the

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<sup>65</sup> Lockspeiser, vol. 1, 155.

orchestration of the *Prélude*. From the beginning, Debussy's usage of the flute without accompaniment (see example 8.2) shows his sensitivity to the tone color of the instruments. The downy, sensuous quality of the flute's first octave, smoothly playing the chromatic melody, is very suitable to reflect the lethargic feeling of the Faun. From the outset, a dream-like scene is suggested well. When the solo flute finally settles at measure four, the interlocking oboes and clarinets react with a pungent diminished minor seventh chord. The oboes' rather poignant tone dominates the sonority of this chord, implying a light stimulation to the dream, which is vividly opened by the harp's *glissandi* and extended to a distance by the horns' echoing effects. Dramatically and imaginatively, Debussy designs a pause after the echo subsides, allowing the sound to resonate in the air. The silence here suggests that the Faun's mind is still wandering within the dream, which very appropriately reflects the first question in the poem: "Aimai-je un rêve?" (Was it a dream I loved?); the passage is shown in examples 8.2 and 8.3.

**Très modéré**  
1<sup>o</sup> SOLO

3 FLÛTES  
*p doux et expressif*

2 HAUTBOIS

2 CLARINETTES EN LA

4 CORN A PISTONS EN FA

2 HARPES  
1<sup>re</sup> accordez  
LA2-SIB, DO2-REb, MIb-FAB, SOL2-LAb  
1<sup>re</sup> glissando

The musical score is written for a full orchestra. The top staff is for the first flute, marked '1<sup>o</sup> SOLO' and 'p doux et expressif'. The second staff is for the oboes. The third and fourth staves are for the clarinets in A. The fifth and sixth staves are for the four horns in F. The bottom staff is for the harp, with instructions for the first position: '1<sup>re</sup> accordez LA2-SIB, DO2-REb, MIb-FAB, SOL2-LAb' and a '1<sup>re</sup> glissando' marked with a wavy line.

Ex. 8.2. Debussy, *Prélude*, mm. 1-4.

The musical score for Debussy's *Prélude*, measures 5-10, is presented in a multi-staff format. The staves are labeled as follows: HAUTB. (Hautbois), CL. (Clarinete), 1<sup>re</sup> CORN. (Corne), 2<sup>e</sup> CORN. (Corne), 1<sup>re</sup> HARPE (Harp), 2<sup>e</sup> HARPE (Harp), and four string staves (Violins I, Violins II, Violas, and Cellos/Double Basses). The woodwinds and harp play melodic lines with various dynamics such as *p*, *pp*, and *ppp*. The strings provide a harmonic foundation with sustained notes and some movement. A *glissando* is marked in the first harp staff. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 8.3. Debussy, *Prélude*, mm. 5-10.

From the start of the flute's solo line, Debussy effectively mixes movement and rest, as Lockspeiser describes: "...as in his [the Faun's] flute-playing, there is always a constant interplay between action and

indolence."<sup>66</sup> The shape of the flute's solo contains not only contrasted musical interplay, as observed by Lockspeiser, but it also implies possible relationships with the poem. If we look the first note, C<sup>#</sup>, as the representation of the horizon (line 20, "C'est, à l'horizon pas remué d'une ride,") the effect of the chromatic descending scale of the solo reflects the pouring out of the faun's flute (line 16-17, "ma flûte au bosquet arrosé d'accords"); when the melody rises above the horizon (C<sup>#</sup>), it mirrors a description in the poem: (line 22, "De l'inspiration, qui regagne le ciel").

The harps' arpeggios produce a dreamlike atmosphere in the *Prélude*, a device that has subsequently become a cliché of Hollywood film-scoring, but in Debussy's time still retained a freshness and originality. With combinations of the harp and other instruments, Debussy's orchestration suggests an atmosphere that hovers between dream and reality. At measures 21, 23 and 26, the first harp's arpeggios (on C<sup>#</sup>7, B9, and E9 chords, respectively) create a dreaming effect to accompany the solo flute, but the second harp interrupts the dream-like effect with its short rolled chords. At measure 79 (the reprise of the first main section, according to Wenk's analysis), the first harp's arpeggios (this time in E major) again accompanying the solo flute, but the first oboe's pungent, athletic figure at

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<sup>66</sup> Lockspeiser, vol. 1, 154.

measure 83 seems to draw the situation back to reality. At measure 86, the lyrical oboe replaces the flute as the solo instrument, here pitched a half step lower, with the background accompaniment also transposed a half step lower to E<sup>b</sup> major. This time the dreamlike mood is dispelled by the English horn's more biting and active character at measure 90.

At measure 31 (see example 7.1), Debussy creates a dramatic change in the music and gradually builds towards the passionate middle section (beginning at measure 55). Here, for the first time in this work, the flute's solo melody (now transformed) is transferred to the clarinet. The clarinet begins in the somewhat rough tone color of the middle throat register at the pickup to measure 31, but quickly achieves its brighter clarion register in the following measure, with a more agitated figuration, suggesting a gradual emergence of the Faun's passion. The orchestration of the background also provides a vivid image corresponding to this growing emotion. The veiled tone color of muted horns reveals a somewhat mysterious effect. Their sudden change of dynamics as they accompany the clarinet may imply an unexpected encounter of the Faun or function as an "alert" that "the Faun had sighted a female."<sup>67</sup> The unusual usage of a hopping figure played by the harp and drum-like cellos, followed by nervous back-and-forth figures,

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<sup>67</sup> Antony Hopkins, *Sounds of Music: A Study of Orchestral Texture* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1982), 138.

together with the *pizzicato* strings, may suggest a restless beating of the nymph's fearful heart, or imply the scene of the scattering of the Naiads, as in line 31 of Mallarmé's poem: "*Ce vol de cygnes, non! de naïades se sauve Ou plonge...*" (The flight of swans, no! of naiads flees Or plunges...).<sup>68</sup>

In the middle section, beginning at measure 55 (see example 8.4), the D<sup>b</sup> major lyrical melody first appears in the woodwinds in two-octave doublings. This section makes a major contrast to the rest of the work. Debussy creates an opulent sensuality by scoring his expansive melody for abundantly doubled woodwinds; the syncopated accompaniment of the violins and violas adds a passionate intensity.

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<sup>68</sup> Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 307.



**Même mouv<sup>t</sup> et très soutenu**

*p* expressif et très soutenu *mf*

FL.

HAUTB.

*p* expressif et très soutenu *mf*

COR ANGL.

*p* expressif et très soutenu *mf*

CL.

*p* expressif et très soutenu *mf*

B<sup>no</sup>

*pp*

COR 3

(3, 5) *pp*

**Même mouv<sup>t</sup> et très soutenu**

VI *pp*

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

arc. *pp*

D.B. *pp*

Ex. 8.4. Debussy, *Prélude*, mm. 55-58.

When the melody is transferred to the strings in octave doublings at measure 63 (see example 7.2), the emotion is further intensified by the woodwinds' small-interval ostinato with a cross-rhythmic effect. Only rarely are the two harps employed at the same time in this work. Here, Debussy combines them in an arpeggio figuration, urgently reinforcing the swell of the passion. The orchestration here, a string-based lyrical melody with winds and harps supporting the harmonic background, is very romantic, and can easily be correlated with the orchestration of Tchaikovsky or of Wagner. Debussy exerts an effective orchestral cliché here to present a fervent effect, an unusual feature in his orchestral works. One can imagine this orchestral effect reflecting the Faun's inner passion, bursting like a ripe pomegranate and attracting bees (line 95-96: “Tu sais, ma passion, que, pourpre et déjà mûre, Chaque grenade éclate et d'abeilles murmure”), or reflecting, the Faun's intense desire in pursuing the two nymphs from his memory (line 62: “O nymphes, regonflons des SOUVENIRS divers”).

Lockspeiser suggests a duality of meanings in Mallarmé's poem; there may be two nymphs and two fauns, all with contrasting personalities.<sup>69</sup> In the score of the *Prélude*, the flute's solo melody is twice taken by two solo instruments, at measure 94 (two flutes, see example 7.3) and measure 100

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<sup>69</sup> Lockspeiser, vol. 1, 154.

(first flute and solo cello, see example 4.13). The duality may not be so obvious in the unison of two flutes, but it is clear in the doubling of flute and cello, the two instruments each retaining their character in the doubling.

At the end of Mallarmé's poem, the Faun, after experiencing the mixed dream-like reverie and the stuffy atmosphere of the real afternoon, finally chooses to give way to intoxicated sleep, hoping to return to his dream to seek the nymph's shadow ("Couple, adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins"). At measure 106 (see example 8.5), the harps play a descending motif in their resonant middle register, creating a graceful atmosphere for the intoxicated sleep. In the next measure, the veiled sonority of the muted horns, combined with the first section of the divided first violins in a close chord position, suggests a shadow-like sonority. The antique cymbal's tinkling effect is also an excellent representation of the light of a distant star (line 109: "Ouvrir ma bouche à l'astre efficace des vins!"). Hopkin interprets this as "the first stars appearing in the evening sky."<sup>70</sup> The atmosphere produced in the last few measures of the music, the flutes' dimming chords, the harp's harmonics, the first violins' ascending diminished chord and the pizzicato low strings, delicately implies the extended mood of the poem, confirmed by

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<sup>70</sup> Hopkins, 142.

Debussy's own words: "As for the ending, it's a prolongation of the last line."<sup>71</sup>

*Très lent et très retenu jusqu'à la fin*

*Très lent et très retenu jusqu'à la fin*

Div. ppp

Ex. 8.5. Debussy, *Prélude*, mm. 106-110.

<sup>71</sup> Lesure and Nichols, 85.

Mallarmé was very pleased with the way Debussy's music presented the concealed ideas in his poem; Debussy recalled Mallarmé's opinion of the music: "I wasn't expecting anything like that! This music prolongs the emotion of my poem and conjures up the scenery more vividly than any colour."<sup>72</sup>

### *Nocturnes*

The origin of Debussy's *Nocturnes* is uncertain. In 1892, in a letter to his friend and sponsor, André Poniowski, Debussy mentions being almost finished with a work, three *Scènes au Crépuscule*, that was inspired by Régnier's poem and taking its title.<sup>73</sup> Lockspeiser assumes that this work is the origin of Debussy's *Nocturnes*, and speculates that it underwent a second transformation to *Three Nocturnes for Violin and Orchestra*, which Debussy had intended to compose for the Belgian violinist, Eugène Ysaÿe, although the project was not fulfilled.<sup>74</sup> In a letter to Ysaÿe in 1894, Debussy mentions three nocturnes:

In the first one the orchestra is strings only, in the second flutes, four horns, three trumpets and two harps and in the third one both groups come together. It's an experiment, in fact, in finding the different combination possible inside a single colour, as a painter might make a study in grey, for example.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Lesure and Nichols, 218.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>74</sup> Lockspeiser, vol. 1, 127-8.

<sup>75</sup> Lesure and Nichols, 75.

Lockspieser relates the pictorial reference in this letter to *Nuages*, the first movement of *Nocturnes*, and provides more evidence to relate the third movement, *Sirènes*, to Régnier's poems *Anciens et romanesques* and *L'Homme et la Sirènes* as well as to Swinburne's *Nocturne*, are poems about the mermaids and seascape.<sup>76</sup> In the second movement, *Fêtes*, the woodwind and trumpets dominate most of the melodies, which can be correlated to the instrumentation Debussy mentioned in his letter to Ysaÿe.

### *Nuages*

Affected by Impressionistic painters, such as Monet, Turner, Renoir and Pissarro, the orchestration of *Nuages* shows Debussy's treatment of light and color, as seen in the composer's own words: "*Nuages* renders the unchanging aspect of the sky and the slow solemn motion of the clouds, fading away in grey tones lightly tinged with white."<sup>77</sup> In the beginning (see example 4.41), the combination of the clarinets in the lower clarion and throat registers, with two bassoons doubled at the lower octave, blends well and produces a neutral sound effect, which is very suitable to suggest a gray color. Their ostinato figure also vividly "renders the unchanging aspect of the sky and the slow solemn motion of the clouds." At measure 3, the oboe

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<sup>76</sup> Lockspeiser, vol. 1, 129.

<sup>77</sup> Cox, 20.

adds a light-edged tone color to the combination. Because it doubles and highlights the main melodic line, the effect is not obtrusive.

At the end of the clarinets' and bassoons' ostinato figure at measure 5, the English horn's tritone-based motif (see example 4.31) softly but distinctively contributes its pungent tone color to the smooth background, an effect that was "suggested to Debussy by the hooter of a *bateaumouche* on the Seine."<sup>78</sup> The English horn's motif is like a leitmotif, its seven entrances colorfully decorating the musical milieu.

With the exception of solo passages, the strings are muted throughout the entire movement, which not only produces a reduced sound but also creates a veiled sonority and simulates the aural impression of a gray sky. Divided strings serve a colorful function in this movement. By dividing the strings, individual notes are de-emphasized, but a denser sonority and more complex texture is achieved, which corresponds to the dense background in a painting.

At measure 7 (see example 5.27), the violins, muted and divided into six parts, create a distinct color to support the English horn's motif. Their thin quality in the high tessitura, with a somewhat veiled effect from the mutes, vividly implies a high cloud with perhaps a tinted color. As the

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<sup>78</sup> Nichols, "Debussy, Claude," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 5, 298.

sustained interval shifts from major third to minor third two measure later, a clear mutation of color occurs.

At measure 64, Debussy employs divided strings, spanning to five octaves, creating a dense but soft d<sup>#</sup> minor chord to support the Oriental pentatonic melody of harp and flute (see example 6.23). The divided strings produce a wide band of sound that resembles the different-layered background of a painting. The harp's un-dampened resonance suggests an effect of twinkling light, and with the combination of the flute, enriches the Oriental flavor of the pentatonic melody.

Using solo strings to create distinct individual sounds is also an effective and colorful aspect of the orchestration of *Nuages*. At measure 57, a solo viola plays a melody that features a chromatic descending passage, which contrasts with the oboes' ostinato figure (see example 4.29). The viola, on its A string, produces a clear, somewhat reedy tone color, which shares some timbre similarity with the oboes. The two different characters of the melodic lines played by the oboes and viola produce a very distinct colorful effect, which suggests the image of perhaps a different color with a distinctive edge.

*Nuages* is not a dramatic movement, but rather explores closely-related moods and colors through imaginative and effective



orchestration. Even though Debussy directs our attention to visual phenomena in his title, *Nuages*, one should not forget that this is a study of the permutation of sonority.

### *Fêtes*

Debussy described this movement:

*Fêtes* gives us the vibrating dancing rhythm of the atmosphere with sudden flashes of light. There is also the episode of the procession (a dazzling, fantastic vision), which makes its way through the festive scene and becomes merged in it. But the background remains persistently the same; the festival with its blending of music and luminous participation in the cosmic rhythm.<sup>79</sup>

In a letter to Paul Dukas in 1901, Debussy mentions that *Fêtes* “was based, as always, on distant memories of a festival in the Bois de Boulogne; the ‘ghostly procession’ was, on that occasion, made up of cuirassiers! . . .”<sup>80</sup>

The lively, joyful, atmosphere of a festival is suggested from the beginning by the violins’ energetic rhythm. The violins, playing *spiccato* in a high tessitura, with an active, ostinato rhythm, create a bustling effect; this rhythm is later transferred to low strings. With a tarantella-like rhythm, an arching melody is circulated in a lively manner between three groups: the English horn doubled with clarinets, flutes with oboes, and bassoons with cellos. The shifting of instruments to produce a change of tone colors is an

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<sup>79</sup> Cox, 22.

<sup>80</sup> Lesure and Nichols, 117.

important orchestration technique in Debussy's works. Here, the shifting tone color is effective not only to create freshness among the many repetitions of the melody, but also in its implication of a bustling scene of great variety at the festival.

At measure 26, two harps play *glissandi* (see example 7.4). Their great resonance and sweeping effect adequately depict a "sudden flash of light," as Debussy described in the letter quoted above.

In the middle section, beginning in measure 116 (see example 7.5), a procession approaching from a distance is first suggested by a slow regular rhythmic figure. Here, Debussy's employment of instruments presents a colorful effect even in the softest dynamic; three instrument groups, harps, timpani and pizzicato low strings, blend with their dark tone color and similar resonance to create a round, delicate and articulated background. At measure 124, three muted trumpets play a fanfare in a chordal arrangement starting from a soft dynamic; they imitate a steel-like sound to refer to a procession of the "*cuirassiers*" (see example 5.14).

After the end of the trumpets' fanfare at measure 139, Debussy employs a woodwind *tutti* in next measure, with ever increasing dynamic to imply the approach of the procession (see example 8.6). Here, again, a shift of color from the trumpets to the woodwinds occurs. The effect of a mute on

a trumpet, or indeed on any instrument, is a suppression of the higher partials. Here, when the woodwinds are substituted for the muted trumpets, the rich overtones of the many woodwinds create a much brighter timbre, suggesting a change of acoustic; perhaps the procession has just rounded a corner and thus become significantly more audible. The addition of the upper strings' *pizzicato* at the entry of the woodwinds supports the sonority of the latter, providing a percussive effect.

1<sup>re</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> FL. **11** *p* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

PIC. FL. *p* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

HAUTOB. *p* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

COR ANG. *p* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

CL. *p* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

1<sup>re</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> BOÛS. *p* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

TROMP. (Otez les Sourdines)

1<sup>re</sup> HARPE

2<sup>e</sup> HARPE

TYMB.

**11** *pizz.* *p* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.* Div.

Div. *pizz.* *p* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

Div. *pizz.* *p* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

*pizz.* *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

*peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

*peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

Unis *peu* *a* *peu* *cresc.*

Ex. 8.6. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 139-144.

At measure 156 (see example 8.7), as the procession merges into the festival, Debussy combines the festival's arching melody (in upper strings

doubled at three octaves) with the procession's fanfare (in trumpets and trombones), thereby unifying all the thematic material of *Fêtes*. The snare drum, a representative of the military band, combines with timpani, woodwinds, and low strings to construct a bustling rhythmic background. Within the heavy texture and strong dynamic, distinct musical lines are presented in different instrumental groups, vividly providing an image of two events, the procession and the festival, joining together.

Flute 1-2

Oboe

Clarinet

Bassoon 1-2

Horns

Trumpets

Trombone 1-2

Trombone 3 and Tuba

Harp

Timpani

Cymbals

Tambourine

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Contrabass

Ex. 8.7. Debussy, *Fêtes*, mm. 156-159.

The festival continues its lively activity after the procession has passed. Before the carnival ends, Debussy dramatically creates an elegant passage beginning in measure 252 (see example 4.19), where, accompanied by the *pizzicato* strings' delicate touch, the oboe takes the melody and creates a melancholy mood with its distinctive timbre, perhaps suggesting the time for departure. Ten measures before the end, the muted trumpets' soft sustained sound is energized by grace notes, vividly portraying the distant fanfares of the procession.

### *Sirènes*

The well-known story from the *Odyssey* of the Sirens luring sailors onto the rocks with their enchanting singing provides a clear image for this *Nocturne*, for which Debussy employs a wordless female chorus as a literal representation of the Sirens. In this movement, in addition to the Sirens' beautiful, alluring voices, a seascape is also vividly presented, with its wave-like figurations, shimmering light, and onomatopoeic cries of the seagull. In Debussy's own words "the sea and its countless rhythms' and presently, amongst the waves, silvered by the moonlight, is heard the mysterious song of the Sirens as they laugh and pass on."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Cox, 22.

At the beginning (see example 8.8), three layers of waves are vividly suggested: the harps' lower fifth combines with the basses, providing a dark sonority to show the deepest, steadiest current; the harps' higher fifth combines with the moving cellos to show the middle level of the undulation, while the clarinet's arpeggio represents the crest of the wave. The horns softly imitate the Sirens' call (the mezzo sopranos response comes in the next measure), with their hollow character of sound also suggesting a sense of the wide expanse of the sea.

CLARINETTES EN LA

1<sup>re</sup> ET 2<sup>e</sup> CORNS EN FA

3<sup>e</sup> ET 4<sup>e</sup> CORNS EN FA

2<sup>e</sup> HARPE

8 MEZZO SOPRANI

VIOLONCELLES

CONTREBASSES

*Moderément animé*

*Sourdes ppp*

*Div.*

Ex. 8.8. Debussy, *Sirènes*, mm. 1-2.

Debussy creates various wave-like figures in this movement; the example above is one of the delicate figurations. A complex wave figuration



is seen at measure 26, where the strings, in seven different lines, provide a complex texture to create a multi-layer wave to support the sopranos, representing the Sirens (see example 6.21 and the discussion in the section on the string's characteristic figuration).

The flash of light is also used as a special effect in this movement, and the tremolo strings become an important tool to this end. Beginning in measure 14 (see example 8.9), the tremolo strings, particular the violins in a high register, provide a soft shimmering background for the mezzo-sopranos. In the next measure, after the sopranos' powerful call, the violins play tremolo, with a quick shift of dynamics and an octave-leaping figure, to provide the effect of a flash of light, which is further reinforced by the clarinets and flutes with their own octave-leaping figure. The harps add a strong chord at the top of these leaping and *crescendo* figures, emphasizing the flashing light with their full resonance.

Ex. 8.9. Debussy, *Sirènes*, mm. 14-17.

At measure 105 (see example 8.10), a soft but complex texture suggests a vivid image of the seascape, as the Sirens' charming song is sung

by the alternating divisions of sopranos; Debussy's direction, *à bouche fermée* (with closed mouth), dissipates any directional sense of the voice and thereby contributes to the seductive ambience of the Sirens. Accompanying this, the arpeggio of the first flute and clarinet represents a larger undulation; the violins' finger tremolo and the second and third flutes' trill-like sextuplet creates a smaller wave, while the articulated horns, harp, and *pizzicato* strings imply the breaking of the waves, and the seagull is vividly suggested by the grace-note effect of the double reeds (oboe and English horn).

Ex. 8.10. Debussy, *Sirènes*, mm, 104-106.

Without any traditional thematic development, Debussy effectively employs a colorful orchestration to describe the seascape and to create a vivid image for the esoteric story. In general, the techniques of the instruments are not new, but their ingenious usages and imaginative combinations in this movement produce an effective and exotic tone painting.

### *La mer*

*La mer*, composed between 1903 and 1905, is, apart from two unfinished projects titled “symphony,” the only work in which Debussy attempted a symphonic style of composition. Debussy subtitled the work “Trois esquisses symphoniques” (Three Symphonic Sketches). Cox considers *La mer* as “the best symphony ever written by a Frenchman” and points out the construction of the untraditional, but “beautifully-wrought, cogent symphonic movement.”<sup>82</sup> Lockspeiser wrote that “*La mer* is the greatest example of an orchestral Impressionist work.”<sup>83</sup>

The sea exerted a great influence on Debussy. For him, the sea was a representative of passion and it provided immense inspiration. As a son of a sailor, Debussy was, at first, expected to follow his father’s career in the Marines. In a letter to André Messager (in 1903), Debussy wrote: “You’re unaware, maybe, that I was intended for the noble career of a sailor and have only deviated from that path thanks to the quirks of fate. Even so, I’ve retained a sincere devotion to the sea.”<sup>84</sup> In *Sirènes*, the third movement of *Nocturnes*, Debussy has already showed his interest in a subject related to the sea. Here, again, with his copious, unrestrained imagination, he describes

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<sup>82</sup> Cox, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Lockspeiser, vol. 2, 28-29.

<sup>84</sup> Lesure and Nichols, 141.

the sea's various countenances with his brimming musical ideas and colorful orchestration.

Debussy shared a similar interest with Claude Monet in choosing the sea as an inspirational subject; *Sunrise, The Sea at Pourville, The Manneporte* and *High Sea* are among Monet's famous seascape paintings. Other visual artists and their works have been considered to have influenced Debussy, such as the sea paintings of Joseph Turner (one of Debussy's favorite painters), and the works of the Japanese artist, Katsushika Hokusai; Debussy requested that Hokusai's, *The Hollow of the Wave off Kanagawa*, be reproduced as the cover of the score of *La mer* when it was published in 1905.<sup>85</sup>

Two other factors may have influenced *La mer*. The first is the breakdown of Debussy's marriage. In 1904, he left his first wife, Rosalie (Lily) Texier, and went to live with Emma Bardac, a banker's wife who was apparently very charming; Fauré had previously written *La bonne chanson* for her. The affair provoked severe criticism from his friends and led to Lily's attempted suicide, both of which disturbed Debussy significantly. In addition, Debussy was working on Settings of Poe's *The Devil in the Belfry*

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<sup>85</sup> Cox, 26.

and *The Fall of the House of Usher* during this period;<sup>86</sup> both works are terrifying stories, and may have exerted their influence on Debussy. The overwrought emotions of Debussy during the time he was composing *La mer* are perhaps reflected most clearly in the violent opening of the third movement (see example 5.29).

The three movements of *La mer* have descriptive titles: *De l'aube à midi sur la mer*, *Jeu de vagues*, *Dialogue du vent et de la mer*. The extra-musical meanings of these titles served as an inspiration to the composer, and provide an imaginative source for the listener. In the following study, examples will be given from each movement to demonstrate how Debussy employs imaginative orchestration to create the various states of the sea, and the changing milieu.

### **First Movement:**

#### **De l'aube à midi sur la mer (From Dawn to Midday at Sea)**

Debussy begins this movement with the dark, full sonority of the basses and the rolling timpani, creating a deep and slightly vibrant atmosphere. The harps, playing in octaves in their low register, together with the cellos (also in octaves), produce a dark and resonant sound, blending with the background. The harps' resonance suggests perhaps a faint light in

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<sup>86</sup> Trezise, 1-7.





fifth also share a tone color similar to the Chinese flute; this, perhaps, can be correlated to Debussy's preference for Hokusai's painting. In the background, the second violins' and violas' wave-like ostinato figure suggests the shimmering surface of the sea, with the cellos' wider range and more active motion implying an undulation below. The harp's rolling chords add their resonance, and suggest the ever-extending rays of the sun.

Ex. 8.12. Debussy, *La mer* I, mm. 33-34.

The second principal section starts at measure 84, where Debussy employs the four-part divided cellos to dominate the sonority, a very unusual arrangement in Debussy's orchestration (see example 6.4 and the discussion

in the section on strings). At the structural changing point, Debussy uses the cellos again to create a full, strongly articulated and intense sonority, combined with the swelling of the rolling timpani and the horns, to proclaim a new section. This drastic change vividly suggests rumbling thunder or a slow but huge surge of the sea, accumulating its power to strike a large outcropping of rock.

At the coda (see example 6.27), the harps' tinkling sound is employed again to produce an effect of light. Here, in contrast to the low, full and dark sound in the beginning, the harps' arpeggios, in a high register, produce a bright tone color and add a clear articulation to the ensemble. This suggests perhaps the midday seascape filled with the radiance of the sun at its zenith. As the music advances towards a splendid *tutti* ending, the luminous atmosphere of the midday suggested in the title is vividly presented.

**Second Movement:**  
**Jeux de Vagues**  
**(Play of the Waves)**

In this movement, apart from a few powerful orchestral *tutti*, a light, chamber-style orchestration is typically employed to reflect the playful character suggested in the title. The woodwinds' agile quality is used effectively to create a nimble, lively musical milieu, such as in the swift triplet staccato figure of the flutes and clarinets (doubled at the octave) from

measure 60 to 67 (see example 4.35). The strings are also used more lightly, particularly in the undulating figuration. If we are to subscribe to the idea that *La mer* is a type of symphony, then *Jeux de Vagues* must be considered as the Scherzo movement.

At the beginning of this movement, a lively and vivid picture of the sea is presented; the chords of the English horn, clarinets, and bassoons combine with the tremolo violas and violins to suggest a quiet but slightly undulating seascape, while the alternating bell and harp, with their tinkling resonance, suggest light in the background, or perhaps the warning bell of a buoy, and the cymbals' soft crash vividly emulates the splash of the waves. Two flutes play sustained thirds beginning in measure four, with a *crescendo* gradually emerging. At measure five, the flutes play a swift chromatic descending scale, linked by the clarinets' sinuous figuration. Both instruments' agile character provides a vivid image, interpreted by Trezise as "a gull diving into the water in search of food, breaking the calm surface of the water painted in bars 1-4, and sending up spray that is caught up in the wind."<sup>87</sup> The *crescendo* of the alternating trumpets playing *staccato* figure provides a lively emulation of the gull's clapping wings, or perhaps the flapping of fish (see example 8.13).

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<sup>87</sup> Trezise, 62.

Flute

English Horn

Clarinet in A

Bassoon

Cymbals

Glockenspiel

Harp

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Contrabass

Flute

Alto Saxophone

Bass

Horn

Trombone

Cymbals

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Ex. 8.13. Debussy, *La mer* II, mm. 1-8.

**Third Movement:**  
**Dialogue du Vent et de La mer**  
**(Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea)**

As suggested by the title, two groups are implied in this movement; the wind is represented by the trumpet's motif (a cyclic theme first encountered in the first movement) that first appears at measure 31 (see example 6.11), and the sea is evoked by a motif, played by the double reeds that is first heard at measure 56 (see example 8.14). The wind motif reveals a strong character, with a brass-related and a more articulated figure. The sea motif, more legato and woodwind-related, contrasts to the wind motif; it has a soft, lyrical quality. The main part of the movement is constructed from these two motifs; their different characters literally create the dialectic atmosphere suggested in the title.

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Gtr. (Trumpet), Cor A. (Horn A), Cl. (Clarinet), 1er Bass (First Bassoon), and 2e et 3e Bass (Second and Third Bassoons). The score is for measures 56-59 of Debussy's *La mer III*. The tempo markings are 'très' and 'légèrement'. The dynamics are 'mf' and 'f'. The expression is 'expressif et soutenu'. The Gtr. part has a melodic line with a triplet in measure 56. The Cor A. part has a similar melodic line. The Cl. part has a more rhythmic line. The 1er Bass part has a melodic line. The 2e et 3e Bass part has a more rhythmic line.

Ex. 8.14. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 56-59.

Multifarious wave figurations, with different rhythmic patterns and directions, can produce a complex texture that vividly suggests the churning of the sea; this arrangement is used often in *Sirènes* (see example 6.21 and 8.10). When the direction and rhythmic pattern of the undulations occurring in different parts are synchronized, the integrated parts create a forceful effect that suggests an even more dramatic surge. In the third movement of *La mer*, this occurs more often in combinations such as the low strings at measure 56, and in the following example.

At measure 94, the violins and violas play a wide range of arpeggios with a hesitant dotted rhythm to accompany the horns' powerful declaration of the iambic motif. The strings' strong articulation and dynamic provide a violently undulating background that vividly suggests large surges of the sea waves (see example 8.15). Here, the wave figurations of the violins and violas are coordinate to produce a more focused sonority.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *La mer* III, measures 94-97. The score is written for Cello (Cello), Cymbal (Cymb.), Violins (VI.), and Viola (Vla.). The Cello part has a melodic line with a 2nd ending bracket. The Cymbal part has a single note. The Violins and Viola parts feature a dense, sustained texture with many notes, including a 'dim.' marking at the end of the section.

Ex. 8.15. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 94-97.

At measure 157 (see example 8.16), the violins' sustained artificial harmonics, with their straight, penetrating, flute-like sound, produce a distinctive tone color. With the support of the sustained horn and basses, and the delicate finger tremolo of the cellos, the violins' distinctive color is combined with the resonant harps to create a calming effect; perhaps the clouds are dispersing as light begins to filter through.



Plus calme et très expressif      Retardez un peu pendant ces 4 mesures . . .

Plus calme et très expressif      Retardez un peu pendant ces 4 mesures . . .

pp (1<sup>re</sup> de chaque pupitre Sol)

sur la touche

sur la touche

molto pp

4 C. Basses Soli

pp

Ex. 8.16. Debussy, *La mer* III, mm. 157-160.

At measure 211 (see example 5.19), a drastic change of musical atmosphere occurs. Three trumpets in a chordal setting play a hustling triplet ostinato figure which dominates the texture. The stopped horns and the woodwinds alternate to signify the energetic rhythm, and the *pizzicato*

strings add to the leaping character. The sudden change of the music, with all the rough characters of the tone color, vividly suggests an image of bursting water, as expressed in Poe's lines from his *A Descent into the Maelström*:

"... the vast bed of the waters seamed and scarred into a thousand conflicting channels, burst suddenly into frenzied convulsion—heaving, boiling, hissing—gyrating in gigantic and innumerable vortices."<sup>88</sup>

The ending of this work is powerful (see example 8.17). After the strong declaration of the iambic motif in the cornets and low brass, the blaring of the brass, combined with the quavering tremolo strings and woodwind trill, creates a strident sonority. Debussy ends this movement with the short, dry sound of timpani and strings. This ending has its counterparts in the conclusions of the third and fourth Acts in *Pelléas et Mélisande*; perhaps, they share a similar emotional portrayal of agony, terror, or anger.

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<sup>88</sup> Trezise, 73.



### *Pelléas et Mélisande*

*Pelléas et Mélisande* is Debussy's only completed opera. His aesthetic in selecting a subject for an opera was revealed when Debussy was asked what kind of poet could offer him a text:

One who, saying things by halves, would allow me to graft my dream onto his; who could conceive characters whose story and background belonged to no time or place, who would not despotically impose on me the scene to be painted and would leave me free, here and there, to have more art than him and complete his work...I dream of texts which will not condemn me to perpetrate long, heavy acts, but will offer me, instead, changing scenes, varied in place and mood, where the characters do not argue, but submit to life and fate.<sup>89</sup>

In Maeterlinck's play, Debussy found the perfect vehicle for his music.

The nebulous images and mysterious style of the Symbolist poet presented Debussy with an exquisite model for his musical imagination. The "changing scenes, varied in place and mood" provide an exuberant imaginative space for Debussy and also for his listeners.

In this opera, the orchestral timbre is as important as melodic and rhythmic elements in reflecting the various scenes and moods. Some special tone colors of the instruments are invested with symbolic representation, such as Wenk's observation that the oboe and English horn are directly associated with Mélisande; the horn is particularly associated with Golaud,

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<sup>89</sup> Felix Aprahamian, notes to Debussy, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1979), CD, EMI Records CDS 7493502.

and the harp with water.<sup>90</sup> Apart from some of the instrument-related characters as in Wenk's observation, Debussy creates very extraordinary colors and effects through his orchestration, to enhance the aspects of image and emotion. Certain aspects of the plot can be identified with effective orchestration in order to demonstrate how Debussy creates the imaginary and emotional ambience in this opera.

### **Image and Sonority**

Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* provides a number of locations for Debussy to set different scenes: a forest, a castle vault, a fountain in the park, a grotto, and others. Debussy creates a distinct atmosphere for each scene, using orchestration as his primary tool.

The first scene in this opera is in the forest. Debussy often employs the lower instruments' full and dark tone color to set a gloomy, mysterious atmosphere for these scenes, which shows from the beginning: the cellos open this opera with a slow moving melody doubled in octaves and supported by the basses and bassoons (see example 6.5). At 3, Debussy uses bassoon, horns, timpani, and low strings to set a murky atmosphere to accompany Golaud's appearance (see example 8.18).

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<sup>90</sup> Wenk, *Claude Debussy and Twentieth-Century Music*, 44.

Entre Golaud

Fl. 1° 3°  
pp

Fl. 2°  
pp

Clar. 1° 3°  
pp

Clar. 2°  
pp

Timb.  
p

H. 1°  
pp

H. 2°  
pp

V. 1°  
pp

V. 2°  
pp

C. B.  
pp

Otez vite les sourdines

Ex. 8.18. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act I, scene 1, [3].

At the beginning of Act II, scene 2, the bassoons and horns are combined with the strings in their low register to create a full, strong sonority that powerfully represents the solemn scene of the castle (see example 4.51, and refer to the discussion on the bassoon's harmonic usage). The most dark and ominous scene is probably in Act III, scene 2, set in *Les souterrains du château* (the castle vaults), where Golaud leads Pelléas for a tour. Omitting the bright color of the violins and flute, Debussy again employs the low strings, bassoons, horns and timpani as the basic sonority. The clarinets' chalumeau register (the lowest octave) is employed to

reinforce the dark sonority, with double reeds and muted horns and trumpets producing a harsh sound to imply the dangerous situation in the vaults.

As Golaud and Pelléas emerge at [31], Debussy uses *pizzicato* low strings and the harp's ascending arpeggios to provide a vivid rising effect. From [32], a fresh and fluid breeze is first presented in the alternating flutes' fast arpeggio figure, and later in the harps' sweeping arpeggio and the strings' tremolo. The iambic motive, a symbol of wind in the third movement of *La mer* (horns at measure 45), is first presented in the oboes and then given to the trumpets, suggesting the blowing of the wind; the cymbals imitate the splash sound of the sea wave, and the piccolo (later joined by the English horn) duplicates the sound of the sea gull (similar to the effect in measure 104 of the third movement of *La mer*). The increasing power of these elements at [34] reveals Golaud and Pelléas' arrival at the terrace, preparing for the first words "*Ah! Ah! Je respire enfin!*" (Ah! at last I can breathe). Debussy's orchestration creates vivid and clear musical images to support the plot, from the castle vault's gloomy, dark sonority, through the rising effect of the harp and *pizzicato* low strings, and finally to the fresh air from the garden and the sea, suggested by the flutes' bright tone color, the sweeping sound and the emulating sound effects.

In Act II, scene 1, *Une fontaine dans le parc*, a brighter aspect of this opera is seen. Debussy employs two flutes in their high register to open this scene (see example 4.8), using the harp's abundant resonance to create a fragrant atmosphere at measure three. The harp's rolling chord, arpeggio, and *glissando* are used often in this scene to suggest the image of water (see example 6.25 and the discussion in the section on the harp). In the same Act, scene 3, the harps' *glissando* is employed with the high woodwinds to create a musical equivalent to the effect of light (see example 6.29 and the discussion in the section on the harp).

Debussy employs timpani, cymbals, bell, triangle, and chimes in this opera. The bell, triangle and chimes are used only once each in separate scenes, where their distinct tone colors contribute to the texture and suggest specific images. The bell is employed in Act III, scene 3, from 38 to 39, where Pelléas senses that it is midday after he emerges from the castle vault. Along with the vivid figuration of the winds, harp, and *pizzicato* basses, the bell adds its tinkling tone color to the violins' leaping melody, its bright effect implying the light at noon (see example 8.19).



38 Même mouvi!

Fl.

Hrb.

Cl.

B.

Cu.

Glock

P.

V.

Vla.

Alt.

C.B.

Il doit étre près de moi.

div.

p doux et pressé et en dehors

pizz

Ex. 8.19. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act III, scene 3, 38.

The triangle is employed in Act IV, scene 3. Its tinkling sound clearly penetrates through the bassoons' and clarinets' triplets and the tremolo strings (see example 5.37). Here, the triangle provides a vivid image of the bell on the sheep's neck. The chime is used close to the end of the last act;

after Mélisande's death, it literally evokes a sense of the funeral bell with its solemn sound.

Debussy also uses special effects to reflect the environment of the scenes. In Act II, scene 2, three measures before [17], Debussy employs the clarinets' chalumeau register, the bassoons' low register, and the low strings to create a rough, dark sonority. An abrupt change of dynamic in these instruments creates an effect of a strange, unidentified situation that happens suddenly during an otherwise peaceful journey of Golaud in the forest, scaring Golaud's horse and causing it to scurry abruptly (see example 4.43). Seven measures after [17], as the horse blindly rushes into a tree, the violins' violent pizzicatos, marked *arraché*, produce a forceful imitation of the collision (see example 6.14).

### **Emotional Atmosphere**

The emotional life of the characters in this opera tends to be revealed indirectly, the essence of Symbolism. Apart from these three main protagonists, Golaud, Pelléas and Mélisande, hardly any emotional reactions can be observed. Arkel, the old king, is like a wise man; in Debussy's own interpretation, "He comes from beyond the grave, and has the objective,

prophetic gentleness of those who are soon to die. . .”<sup>91</sup> Arkel’s reaction to the things happening in his kingdom seems as if from a distance, as a removed presence. Debussy often employs sustained chords in the strings to accompany Arkel’s placid voice, the wind instruments providing even less active figurations; in Arkel’s first appearance, in Act I, scene 2, at [26], a chord in the low winds accompanies his first words, then sustained low strings supercede to support his following sentences. At seven measures after [27], the English horn’s melancholy tone color in its middle register suggests his advanced age. Even in the last Act, after the tragic death of Pelléas, his reactions remain placid.

Yniold’s naivety is shown in Act IV, scene 3, where Debussy employs *pizzicato* strings to suggest a child’s playful character. As Yniold notices the sheep, Debussy uses the strings’ trills and triplets (in strings and woodwinds) to represent the flock (see example 5.37).

Golaud’s emotional reactions are more obvious. His growing jealousy is clearly displayed in Act III, scene 4, when he asks his son, Yniold, to spy on Pelléas and Mélisande from the window. Beginning in [60], Debussy uses the strings’ triplets, first in violas, then in violins and cellos, to create an agitated effect. At [67], the strings’ triplets become tremolos, accompanied by

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<sup>91</sup> Roger Nichols and Richard L. Smith, *Claude Debussy Pelléas et Mélisande* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 35.

an increasing dynamic, a climbing register, and the addition of more winds, to produce a more harsh and vibrant sonority, implying Golaud's frantic mood.

Pelléas' love for Mélisande is always concealed, perhaps even from himself. The first time he shows his love is in Act III, scene 1, when he sees Mélisande one beautiful night in the castle's tower. When Pelléas plays with Mélisande's hair and kisses it, avoiding her gaze, his love is implied in the caressing of Mélisande's hair. At [15], Debussy employs a solo viola to play a plaintively lyrical melody, delicately representing Pelléas' love (see example 8.20). As the melody is transferred to two solo violins doubled in octaves (with the clarinet doubling the lower octave), the higher violin's thin, delicate tone color further intensifies the emotion. The accompaniment, a harp's fragrant sonority combined with the legato strings, adds depth to the tender atmosphere.

15

1<sup>re</sup> H. *pp* *pizz pp*

P. *pp* *pizz pp*

2<sup>es</sup> V. *div.* *sourdines pp*

I. Alt. Solo *sans sourdine* *p tres expressif*

Alt. *sourdines pp*

Vcl. *sourdines pp*

Fl. *1<sup>er</sup> Solo* *pp tres doucement expressif*

Hrb. *pp* *dim.*

Cl. *pp* *dim.*

Cors. *pp* *dim.*

1<sup>re</sup> H. *pp* *dim.*

P. *pp* *dim.*

2<sup>es</sup> V. *pp* *pizz pp*

I. Alt. Solo *pp* *arco*

Alt. *pp* *prenez la sourdine*

Vcl. *pp* *arco*

Ex. 8.20. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act III, scene 1, at 15.

In Act IV, scene 2, Golaud's violent reaction to Mélisande hurts her deeply. Debussy extends his depiction of Mélisande's torture into the

interlude between scenes. Beginning at 24, the oboes' plaintive tone color expressively leads the melody to reflect Mélisande's melancholy feelings. Six measures after 24 (see example 8.21), the flutes join and combine with the violins' ascending arpeggio to begin to build tension. Two measures later, the orchestral *tutti*, very unusual in this opera, appears to create a high point, reaching the emotional apex of the feelings of torment. Here, Debussy creates an intensive sonority by using a melody doubled in three octaves, distributed between woodwinds, trumpets, and violins, with other instruments supported harmonically, but without the harp and percussion. In this *tutti*, the unison violins in very high register dominate the sonority and produce abundant tension. The sudden fall of the melody to two octaves lower creates a drastic change of timbre and also provides an extreme emotional situation.

Ex. 8.21. Debussy, *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 2, six mm. after 24.

Pelléas and Mélisande's love is concealed until the last scene of Act IV, where Pelléas decides to express his feelings for Mélisande to her before he runs away from the kingdom. In a monologue, Pelléas struggles with his

passionate and forbidden love for Mélisande. Seven measures before **38** (see example 8.22), an ascending accented string passage, with a *crescendo*, animatedly and powerfully reflects Pelléas' agitated emotion. Two measures later, the elevation of the pitch and the more sustained figure of the strings, with the addition of oboes, English horn, and clarinets, shows the intensification of Pelléas' passion. The violins, doubled in octaves, here dominate the sonority, with their preponderant strength and tension. Moreover, the soliloquy is punctuated by silence from the orchestra in which Pelléas expresses his anguish without accompaniment; this serves to dramatize his tormented state of mind even more strongly.

The image displays a musical score for Debussy's *Pelléas Act IV, scene 4*, seven measures before measure 38. The score is written for voice and orchestra. The vocal line is in French and includes the lyrics: "Anime Il faut que je la voie à la dernière heure jusqu'à l'heure de son cœur. Il faut que je la voie." The orchestral accompaniment features a prominent ascending string passage in the violins, marked with a forte (f) dynamic and a crescendo. The woodwinds (oboes, English horn, and clarinets) enter in the final measure, adding to the intensity of the scene.

Ex. 8.22. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act IV, scene 4, seven mm. before **38**.



From [42], the violins and violas playing tremolos and combined with the cellos and the woodwinds, start to build an agitated effect, again reflecting Pelléas' mounting passion. Five measures after [42] (see example 8.23), the tremolo strings gradually climb in pitch and simultaneously increase the dynamic; the agitated emotion is brought to a climax in combination with the *crescendo* of the woodwinds. The powerful high point of the opera is arrived at through the last four ascending eighth notes of the strings, marked *crescendo* (similar to example 8.22). Debussy's response to the climax of the story is extraordinary; the orchestra is silenced and Pelléas and Mélisande utter their declarations of love simply in a syllabic setting and without accompaniment. It is difficult to overestimate the power of this moment.

The image shows a page of a musical score for Debussy's *Pelléas*, Act IV, scene 4, five mm. after 42. The score is for a full orchestra and vocal soloists. The vocal parts (Hob., C. a., Cl., B., N., P.) have lyrics in French. The instrumental parts (V., Alt., Vcl., C. B.) are for strings and woodwinds. The score is marked "librement" and "piu cresc.".

Ex. 8.23. Debussy, *Pelléas* Act IV, scene 4, five mm. after 42.

In a letter to Ernest Chausson in 1893, while working on *Pelléas*, Debussy described his idea of using silence: “I found myself using, quite spontaneously too, a means of expression which I think is quite unusual, namely silence (don’t laugh). It is perhaps the only way to give the emotion of a phrase its full value. . .”<sup>92</sup> Compare this, for example, to Wagner’s opera, *Tristan und Isolde*; at the high point in Act I, scene 5, when both lovers express their love, Wagner uses a long and powerful orchestral *tutti* to create a splendid effect to eulogize their great love. By comparison,

<sup>92</sup> Lesure and Nichols, 56.

Debussy's expression at the high point of *Pelléas* is more intimate and direct, yet equally powerful.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

Debussy's musical thought is reflected in the following three quotes:

The music I desire must be supple enough to adapt itself to the lyrical effusions of soul and the fantasy of dreams.<sup>93</sup>

I love music passionately, and because I love it I try to free it from barren traditions that stifle it. It is a free art, gushing forth—an open-air art, an art boundless as the elements, the wind, the sky, the sea! It must never be shut in and become an academic art.<sup>94</sup>

The century of aeroplanes deserves its own music. As there are no precedents, I must create anew.<sup>95</sup>

Debussy was able to articulate his aesthetic ideals clearly. His originality as a composer is revealed in his harmonic style, in his use of whole-tone and pentatonic scales, modes, and non-functional harmonics, as well as in his fresh approach to form, and his subtle and distinctive exploration of sound. This study has focused on the latter: Debussy's

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<sup>93</sup> Joseph Machlis, *Introduction to Contemporary Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 96.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

sophisticated conception of sonority as exhibited in his employment of the orchestra in four significant works.

Although Debussy' usage of instruments and most of his instrumentations are not as aggressive and brilliant as his contemporaries such as Mahler, Strauss, Scriabin, and Stravinsky, his delicate way of exploiting orchestral color is one of his most important contributions. From this study, Debussy's orchestration style can be summarized as follows:

### **Unforced Sound**

Debussy tends to write within a comfortable tessitura of each instrument, in order to produce round, unforced sonorities. His usage of the extremely high or low notes of the instruments (particularly winds) is very careful; he usually uses doublings or a big *tutti* to neutralize the obtrusive quality of the instrument's extreme ranges.

### **Shifting of Tone Color**

Although this technique was not invented by Debussy, his refined approach to orchestration produced subtle effects of great sensitivity. Debussy's explorations of shifting tone color include: the exchange of instruments with similar tone quality, using different textures and backgrounds to accompany a returning melody, alternating different groups

of instruments, and sudden changes of character, dynamics, texture, and instrumentation.

### **Distinctive Combinations of Instruments**

The effective combination of different instruments to produce distinctive sonorities is also an important feature of Debussy's orchestration. This is shown in instrumental doublings, chordal arrangements, and contrasting effects in the main melody and background.

### **Usage of Strings**

Debussy's use of strings is distinctive. Unlike the traditional string-dominated orchestral sonority of the nineteenth century, Debussy used strings mostly to support the winds. Although the strings are rarely absent from the texture, they are often submerged in the background and subsequently effectively employed to lead the melody at climaxes.

### **Usage of Wind Instruments**

Debussy frequently uses wind instruments (particularly woodwinds) to dominate the main melodies in the four works being studied. He uses the low brass very sparingly, generally reserving them for high points. The trumpets and horns are often muted to produce a special tone color. In particular, the horns, with additional techniques of *bouché* and *cuivré* are employed with poetic intention.

### **Sensitive Use of Percussion**

Debussy's employment of percussion varies according to his sensitivity to the tone color required in different works. Although Debussy, on occasion, uses percussion in a traditional manner to support and add brilliant color to climaxes, he also explores many subtle effects, often using only one percussion instrument playing at a soft dynamic.

The many special usages of orchestral color and effect in Debussy's orchestration not only become an important part of his formal structure, but they also provide exuberant pictorial images and emotional atmospheres, demonstrating his correlation of music with the visual arts and literature. In his works related to the sea, a vivid seascape is suggested from the various wave figurations, shimmering light, and onomatopoeic sound effects. The sense of space and effects of light reflect the visual arts, and are vividly implied from his usage of instrumental echoing effects, tremolo strings, harp, and the special timbre of percussion instruments.

Following a thorough study of four important orchestral works by Debussy, I have arranged Debussy's piano piece, *Pagodes*, the first movement of *Estampes*, for full orchestra, in imitation of Debussy's orchestration style. This piano work was completed in 1903, the year Debussy started to work on *La mer*. In *Pagodes*, the pentatonic scale,

together with the low pedal tones' rumbling sonority (resembling the gong in a temple) suggests the Oriental flavor of a pagoda, while the sweeping arpeggios suggest the ornamental style of the temple's structure. This shares similar characteristics with *La mer*, particularly the first movement of that work.

Based on the instrumentation of *La mer*, the instruments used in this arrangement include a triple woodwind section (with the exception of two clarinets), brass (four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba), four percussion (timpani, cymbals, tam-tam and bells), two harps, and a five-part string section (with further divisions). In order to reinforce the bass and obtain the exact low pitches in the piano work, the contrabassoon is also employed (in the four works being studied, Debussy uses the contrabassoon only in the third movement of *La mer*).

The arrangement is designed to follow the style of Debussy's orchestration. The strings serve mostly in the background, with tremolos, *divisi*, and combined articulations employed. Debussy's distinctive usage of instrumental combinations are imitated; these include the flute doubling with harp, English horn doubling with cello, English horn doubling with muted trumpet, the combination of horn with bassoon, and bassoon with cello. The



alternating technique is seen in the flute and piccolo, oboe and flute, trumpet and piccolo, and the two harps.

The glockenspiel is used to create an effect of light, while the harp provides resonance in the background. The tam-tam adds its Oriental flavor and pairs with the cymbals to produce a powerful climax. The low brass instruments are used to reinforce high points, as in Debussy's treatment. Some special sonorities, such as solo muted trumpets, solo flute, solo oboe and four muted horns in octave doublings, are also employed. The entire arrangement is presented in the Appendix.

The synthetic study of the usages and the distinctive combinations of instruments, and how the orchestration serves as an important function to articulate the form and to provide the effective atmosphere for image and emotion constitute the main part of this dissertation. This study complements other literature on Debussy's orchestral works, with a particular contribution to the understanding of his orchestral techniques and style. It is hoped that this study of Debussy's orchestration of four of his major works and my orchestration of his piano work, *Pagodes*, will be of interest to conductors, orchestrators and students of Debussy's music.

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## APPENDIX

### *Pagodes*

An Original Orchestration by Chun-Hsien Chang  
from Debussy's Piano Work, *Estampes*.

#### Instrumentation

Piccolo	Timpani
Flute I, II	Cymbals
Oboe I, II	Tam-tam
English Horn	Glockenspiel
Clarinet in A I, II	Harp I, II
Bassoon I, II, III	Violins I
Contrabassoon	Violins II
Horn I, II, III, IV	Violas
Trumpet in C I, II, III	Violoncellos
Trombone I, II, III	Contrabasses
Tuba	

## Pagodas

Debussy Art. C. H. C.

**Modérément animé**

*délicatement et presque sans nuances*

$$\mathbf{d} = \mathbf{A} \mathbf{x}$$

*rit* *a tempo*

rit

Piccolo  
 2 Flutes  
 2 Oboes  
 English Horn  
 2 Clarinet in A  
 Bassoon 1 & 2  
 Bassoon 3  
 Contrabassoon  
 Horn in F 1 & 2  
 Horn in F 3 & 4  
 Trumpet in C 1 & 2  
 Trumpet in C 3  
 Trombone 1 & 2  
 Trombone 3  
 Tuba  
 Timpani  
 Cymbals  
 Tam Tam  
 Glockenspiel  
 2 Harps  
 Violin I  
 Violin II  
 Viola  
 Cello  
 Contrabass

Modérément animé  
 délicatement et presque sans nuances  
 rit a tempo rit

*a tempo* *rit* *a tempo*

Picc. *mp*

Fl.

Ob. *mp*

E. Hn. *mp*

Cl. A *mp*

Hn. 1&2 *Sordines*

Hn. 3&4 *Sordines*

Timp.

Cym.

T.T.

Glock.

Hp. I *a tempo* *rit* *a tempo*

Vln. I

Vla.

Vc. *le deserts perdus ont*  
*mp pizz*

Cb.

FL. *sans sordines*

Hn. 1.&2. *sans sordines*

Hn. 3.&4. *sans sordines*

C Tpt. 1.&2. *Sordines*

C Tpt. 3. *Sordine*

Timp.

Cym.

Hp. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

The musical score is written for a full orchestra. The top section includes Flute (FL.), Horns 1 & 2 (Hn. 1.&2.), Horns 3 & 4 (Hn. 3.&4.), Trumpets 1 & 2 (C Tpt. 1.&2.), and Trumpet 3 (C Tpt. 3.). The middle section includes Timpani (Timp.), Cymbals (Cym.), and Harp I (Hp. I). The bottom section includes Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The score is in 4/4 time and features a variety of musical notations, including melodic lines, harmonic textures, and dynamic markings such as *sans sordines* and *Sordines*.

**Animez un peu** *poco cresc* **Toujours animé**

Fl. *pp* *poco cresc*

Ob. *pp* *poco cresc*

Cl. A. *pp* *poco cresc*

Bsn. 1&2 *mf* *poco cresc*

C. Bn. *pp* *poco cresc*

Hr. 1&2 *mf* *poco cresc*

Hr. 3&4 *mf* *poco cresc*

C Tpt. 1&2 *sans sonline*

C Tpt. 3 *sans sonline*

Timp. *pp*

Cym. *pp*

T.T.

Hp. I *pp*

**Animez un peu** *poco cresc* **Toujours animé**

Vln. I *pp* *poco cresc*

Vln. II *pp* *poco cresc*

Vla. *pp* *poco cresc*

Vc. *pp* *poco cresc*

Cb. *pp*

Revenez au 1<sup>er</sup> Tempo

Fl

Ob

Cl. A

Bsn. 1&2

Hn. 1&2

Hn. 3&4

Timp

Cym.

Hp. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

1<sup>er</sup> pupitre

2<sup>e</sup> pupitre

1<sup>er</sup>

3<sup>e</sup>

Revenez au 1<sup>er</sup> Tempo

Sans lenteur

Ob

Cl. A

Bsn. 1&2

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

1<sup>er</sup>

Sans lenteur



This image shows a page from a musical score, likely for a symphony. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes various instruments. The instruments listed on the left are:

- Picc.
- Fl.
- Ob.
- Cl. A.
- Bsn. 1.&2.
- Bsn. 3.
- C. Bn.
- Hr. 1.&2.
- Hr. 3.&4.
- C Tpt. 1.&2.
- C Tpt. 3.
- Tbn. 1.&2.
- Tbn. 3.
- Tba.
- Cym.
- G.T.
- Hp. I.
- Vln. I.
- Vln. II.
- Vla.
- Vcl.
- Cb.

The score includes dynamic markings such as *dim molto* and *pp*. The notation is in standard musical notation with various clefs and key signatures.



Picc.  
 Fl.  
 E. Hn.  
 Cl. A.  
 Bsn. 1&2  
 Bsn. 3  
 Hn. 1&2  
 Hn. 3&4  
 C Tpt. 1&2  
 Vln. I  
 Vln. II  
 Vla.  
 Cb.

The musical score is written for a large ensemble. The Piccolo, Flute, and Euphonium parts feature melodic lines with slurs and accents. The Clarinet A part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Bassoon 1&2 part plays a continuous eighth-note pattern. The Horn 1&2 and Horn 3&4 parts have rests followed by melodic entries. The C Trumpet 1&2 part has a melodic line with slurs. The Violin I and Violin II parts have rests followed by melodic entries. The Viola part has a melodic line with slurs. The Cello part has a melodic line with slurs.

return 1° Tempo rit a tempo rit

Picc.  
Fl.  
Ob.  
E. Hn.  
Cl. A.  
Bsn. 1&2  
Bsn. 3  
Hn. 1&2  
Hn. 3&4  
C Tpt. 1&2  
Tump.  
T.T.  
Glock.  
Hp. I  
Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Cb.

div.

Sordines

The musical score is written for a full orchestra. The top system includes Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet A, Bassoon 1&2, and Bassoon 3. The middle system includes Horn 1&2, Horn 3&4, C Trumpet 1&2, Tom Tom, Glockenspiel, and Harp I. The bottom system includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo markings are 'return', '1° Tempo', 'rit', and 'a tempo'. The performance instructions include 'div.' (divisi) and 'Sordines' (muted). The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, and the instruments are grouped by brackets.

*a tempo* *rit* *a tempo*

Picc. *pp*

Ob. *pp*

E. Hn. *pp*

Bsn. 1&2 *mp*

Bsn. 3 *pp*

Hn. 1&2 *mp* *Sordines*

Hn. 3&4 *mp* *Sordines*

C Tpt. 1&2 *mp*

Tbn. 1&2 *pp*

Tbn. 3 *pp*

Tba. *pp*

Timp. *pp*

Cym. *pp*

T.T. *pp*

Glock. *pp*

Hp. I *a tempo* *rit* *a tempo*

Vln. I *a tempo* *rit* *a tempo* *sans sordines*

Vln. II *a tempo* *rit* *a tempo* *sans sordines*

Vla. *mp* *pizz*

Vc. *mp* *pizz*

Cb. *mp* *pizz*

Picc  
 Ob  
 Cl. A  
 Bsn. 1&2  
 Bsn. 3  
 Hn. 1&2  
 Hn. 3&4  
 Tump  
 Cym.  
 Hp I  
 Vln. II  
 Vla  
 Vc  
 Cb.

sans sordines  
 sans sordines

Musical score for page 349, featuring various instruments including Piccolo, Oboe, Clarinet A, Bassoons, Horns, Trumpets, Cymbals, Harp, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *f*, and *sf*, and articulation like accents. The woodwinds and strings play melodic lines, while the brass and percussion provide harmonic support. The harp features a complex arpeggiated texture. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature.

**Animez un peu**

Fl.

Bsn. 1&2

Bsn. 3

C Bn.

Hn. 1&2

Hn. 3&4

Tbn. 1&2

Tbn. 3

Tba.

Cym.

T.T.

Hp. I

**Animez un peu**

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

*toujours ff*

Picc. *ff*

Fl. *ff*

Ob. *ff*

Cl. A *ff*

Bsn. 1&2 *ff*

Bsn. 3 *ff*

C. Bn. *ff*

Hn. 1&2 *f*

Hn. 3&4 *f*

C Tpt. 1&2 *f*

C Tpt. 3 *f*

Tbn. 1&2 *f*

Tbn. 3 *f*

Cym. *ff*

T. T. *ff*

Glock. *ff*

Hrp. I *ff*

Vln. I *ff*

Vln. II *ff*

Vla. *ff*

Vcl. *ff*

Cb. *ff*

*toujours ff*

## 1° Tempo

FL. *f* *dim.* *p* *dim.*

Ob. *f* *dim.* *p* *dim.*

E. Hn.

Cl. A. *f* *dim.* *p* *dim.*

Bsn. 1&2

C. Bn.

C Tpt. 1&2

T.T.

Glock.

I. *f* *dim.*

Hp. II *f* *dim.*

## 1° Tempo

Vln. I *f* *dim.* *p* *dim.* *pp*

Vln. II *f* *dim.* *p* *dim.* *pp*

Vla. *f* *dim.* *p* *dim.* *pp*

Vc. *f* *dim.* *p* *dim.* *pp*

Cb. *f* *dim.* *p* *dim.* *pp*

This musical score page, numbered 353, contains staves for the following instruments:

- E. Hn.** (English Horn): Treble clef, key of D major. It features a melodic line with a half note, a quarter note, and a half note.
- Cl. A** (Clarinet in A): Treble clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Bsn. 1 & 2** (Bassoon 1 & 2): Bass clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- C. Bn.** (Contrabassoon): Bass clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- C Tpt. 1 & 2** (Cornet Trumpet 1 & 2): Treble clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- T. T.** (Timpani): Treble clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- I** (Piano I): Treble and Bass clefs, key of D major. It plays a complex, fast-moving melodic line.
- Hp** (Harp): Treble and Bass clefs, key of D major. It plays a complex, fast-moving melodic line.
- Vln. I** (Violin I): Treble clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with a half note and a quarter note.
- Vln. II** (Violin II): Treble clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with a half note and a quarter note.
- Vla.** (Viola): Treble clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with a half note and a quarter note.
- Vc.** (Violoncello): Bass clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with a half note and a quarter note.
- Cb.** (Contrabass): Bass clef, key of D major. It plays a melodic line with a half note and a quarter note.

The score is written in D major and 4/4 time. The woodwinds and strings play melodic lines, while the piano and harp play complex, fast-moving melodic lines. The timpani plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.



This musical score page, numbered 354, contains staves for the following instruments:

- E. Hn. (English Horn)
- Cl. A. (Clarinet in A)
- Bsn. 1 & 2 (Bassoon 1 & 2)
- Bsn. 3 (Bassoon 3)
- C. Bn. (Contrabassoon)
- Hn. 1 & 2 (Horn 1 & 2)
- Hn. 3 & 4 (Horn 3 & 4)
- C Tpt. 1 & 2 (C Trumpet 1 & 2)
- T. T. (Timpani)
- I (Percussion I)
- Hp (Harp)
- II (Percussion II)
- Vln. I (Violin I)
- Vln. II (Violin II)
- Vla. (Viola)
- Vc. (Violoncello)
- Cb. (Contrabass)

The score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The woodwind and brass sections play melodic lines with various articulations and dynamics. The percussion section, including timpani and two other percussionists, provides a rhythmic foundation with repeated patterns. The string section (Violins I & II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass) plays sustained, low-register lines, with the Contrabass featuring a long, low note in the final measure.

*encore plus pp*

Cl. A  
Bsn. 1&2  
Bsn. 3  
C. Bsn.  
Hn. 1&2  
Hn. 3&4  
C. Tpt. 1&2  
Tbn. 1&2  
T.T.  
I  
II  
Hp  
Vc.  
Cb.

The musical score is written for a large ensemble. The woodwind section includes Clarinet A, Bassoon 1&2, Bassoon 3, and Contrabassoon. The brass section includes Horns 1&2, Horns 3&4, Cornet 1&2, Trumpets 1&2, and Trombones 1&2. The string section includes Timpani, two staves of strings (I and II), Harp, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score features a variety of musical notations, including eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The tempo and mood are indicated by the instruction *encore plus pp* at the top. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 4/4.

This musical score page, numbered 356, contains staves for the following instruments:

- Bsn. 1&2**: First and second Basset Horns, playing a melodic line with some rests.
- Bsn. 3**: Third Basset Horn, playing a similar melodic line.
- C. Bn.**: Contrabassoon, providing a low, sustained accompaniment.
- Hn. 1&2**: First and second Horns, playing a melodic line.
- Hn. 3&4**: Third and fourth Horns, playing a similar melodic line.
- Timp.**: Timpani, playing a steady, rhythmic pattern.
- T.T.**: Tom-toms, providing a rhythmic accompaniment.
- I**: First Violin, playing a complex, fast-moving melodic line.
- II**: Second Violin, playing a similar complex, fast-moving melodic line.
- Vc.**: Violoncello, playing a melodic line with some rests.
- Cb.**: Double Bass, playing a melodic line with some rests.

The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The woodwinds and brass parts are primarily melodic, while the strings and piano provide a complex, rhythmic and harmonic foundation. The piano part features rapid, sixteenth-note passages in both hands.